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OF HOURS IN THE TEMPLE CHURCH

C. J. VAUGHAN D.D.

*MASTER OF THE TEMPLE*





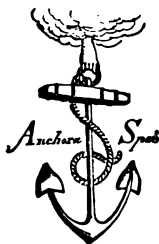


**HALF-HOURS IN THE TEMPLE  
CHURCH**



# HALF-HOURS IN THE TEMPLE CHURCH

By C. J. VAUGHAN, D.D.  
MASTER OF THE TEMPLE



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I.

THE CHRISTIAN SELF-INTROSPECTION  
HUMBLE, BUT NOT MORBID.\*

I know nothing by myself: yet am I not hereby justified.—

1 COR. iv. 4.

Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.—JOHN iii. 21.

THE two texts read together give a notable instance of what the infidel calls the self-contradictions, of what we call the self-corrections, of Holy Scripture.

Theology, gendered of controversy, is cautious and balancing: Revelation, flashing from heaven, is bold and free.

Human hands have soiled, human feet have trampled, the bright, the precious deposit of the faith once delivered. Heresy has corrupted, schism has torn, the simplicity which is in

\* December 12, 1869.

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Christ. Then the Church must mend and patch, must restore and reconcile, must define and systematize;—and the result is Theology—a thing of creeds and formulas, of accuracies and harmonies, necessitated by the existence of error, and accepted as a safeguard by all but the presumptuous.

Still this theology was not the first utterance, but the second: not the voice, but the letter; not the lively, living, life-giving word, but the drier, duller, less sparkling form, in which, as in a protecting casket, the original jewel of Revelation is packed and enfolded.

The very Word itself, conscious of truth, majestic in its divinity, speaks here, speaks there, as God prompts, as man wants it. It stays not to guard against right-hand mistake or left-hand abuse: it flings forth its broad free saying, and waits not to fence itself against each possible misconstruction. Sometimes therefore to the careless ear it seems ambiguous or double-tongued—seems even to contradict itself—seems even to say here what it denies there, or to unsay in this place what it had emphasized in that.

Examples will occur to every one. *He that is not with me is against me*, Christ says in St. Matthew. *He that is not against us is for us*, Christ says in St. Luke. The one is the maxim of decision, the other is the maxim of charity. *Justified by faith*, St. Paul says, *we have peace with God—Not of works lest any man should boast*. *By works a man is justified*, St. James rejoins, *and not by faith only*. The one thinks of a living faith—living, and therefore (for so life proves itself) working: the other has in his view that spurious, degenerate thing, which devils call faith, and God, because it lies lazy, calls infidelity. In some places the two opposite utterances are brought together into one, tied to each other by a most incongruous *for*—as where St. Paul bids the Philippians to *work out their own salvation with fear and trembling*, and adds this unexpected reason—*for it is God which worketh in you*.

The explanation of all this is, that truth has ever at least two aspects: to see but one of these is at once error: to allow for both is a condition of sound doctrine. Yet to state both sides

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in one breath is seldom possible: to stay to reconcile is to miss the force of both: let either have its rush, its swing, its stroke—the *via media*, theologically safe, is practically feeble:—God speaks the free word on this side, and the free word on that—the result is conviction, is wisdom, is strength.

The two brief sayings just read to you—the one from St. Paul in this day's Epistle, the other from St. John in an age when St. Paul was already become Scripture—give us, together, the whole truth on a very interesting and important subject—the proper attitude of a Christian in the estimate of his own condition and prospect—in taking account of his own state before God and for eternity. Both the texts deal with conscience—that marvellous witness, judge, and executioner within—that representative of God in the man, to which we all, with our will or else without it, are evermore rendering an account and a self-reckoning. And both the texts (which is more remarkable) deal with a *quiet* conscience—with the condition of one not self-accusing—with a posture of personal tranquillity, of conscientious repose. With

all this in common, their tone is yet diverse. The one sounds the note of warning, the other of comfort: the net result of their combined teaching is the motto of this Sermon—The Christian self-introspection humble, not morbid.

1. St. Paul has been reproving the tendency which is in all human nature, whether it call itself Protestant or Romanist, to make Popes. Men in those days—having the real thing—having the substance not the shadow of Apostles still with them—were prone—quite in modern fashion—to set up one against another—Apollos against Paul, or Paul against Cephas—even as, in earlier years still, the disciples of Jesus and of the Baptist sought to sow discord and jealousy between the witness and the Subject of testimony, between the Bridegroom and the Bridegroom's friend. St. Paul has dealt severely with this vice of Church-partisanship. *What are we?* he has asked. We are instruments, agencies, workmen: each has his proper gift, his assigned place, his sure reward: the work is one work—and the minister is not the lord, but the property, of the Church which he serves. *Let a man so account of us as of underlings*



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of Christ, and mere dispensers, as confidential servants, of those mysteries, those revealed secrets, which God has made the store and the pabulum of the Church which He bought with His blood. Think, then, he says, how anxious, how responsible, how formidable must be this steward's office. Instead of idolizing this man, feel for him! See him on his way to judgment—a judgment in which it will not be yours to acquit or condemn him—not yours, nay, not his own! *I judge not my own self.*

Such is the context: now read the text.

*For I know nothing by myself.* It is needless to caution the present audience against that ignorant reading of the clause, which has sometimes made it, I have heard, the text of a Sermon on the duty of intellectual humility—as if it were, I know nothing by the exercise of my own unaided understanding. In reality, St. Paul says this—*I know nothing against myself*—I am not conscious to myself of anything—that is, of any obliquity or unfaithfulness in the discharge of my stewardship: my conscience does not reproach me:—*yet*, he adds, *I am not hereby justified*—this silence

of the inward accuser is not enough for justification—for acquittal at the bar of God: Christ, Christ is my Judge—*therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come.* It is an Advent subject, every word of it.

The conscience may be in repose, and yet we may not be justified.

We will part company, for a moment or two, with St. Paul. We walk by his side, we plod after him, with unequal, with lagging steps. We have not his *wonderful conversion* in our memory—we can show no *marks of the Lord Jesus* on these earthly bodies—we *die not daily* in the Confessor's self-crucifixion, we live not above sense in the glory of Christ's resurrection. Let us come down to our own level. It is good to contemplate great ideals—but, after all, it is with ourselves, as we are, that we must this day enter into judgment.

Leaving then St. Paul's more exalted, yet more limited use of the maxim before us, let us speak to ourselves of this peril—the mistaking of a quiet conscience for a justified state.

We call it a peril. Why a peril? Is it not well, some one might say, to be at rest, to be at

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unity within? When I look around me, and see the havoc wrought, in this life and in this, by a morbid self-scrutiny—when I see this friend wrecked upon the quicksand of a miserable misgiving, and that acquaintance stretched daily upon the rack of a *fearful looking for of judgment*, merely by indulging the habit of a perpetual self-inquisition—I can almost thank God, as for appetite and sleep and health, so for a quiet conscience—without entering upon the enquiry, either as to this or those, whether I have a right to it.

My friend! such calm, such tranquillity, might be, as you call it, a simple blessing—I would join you in your thanksgiving for it as for any other of God's good gifts to you—if it were not for this Advent of which the Church is now making mention, and of which she prays you this day not to be forgetful! But, with this in view—that terrible time of which last Sunday's Gospel told as one of men's stoutest hearts failing them at last for fear—we must ask you to make surer work than this for a trial which shall be for life or death eternal!

Many things lull conscience—drug, intoxi-

cate, paralyze it, as well as madden. And then what is its quietude worth?

You have been praying this morning in the Litany, for the forgiveness of your *ignorances*. That clause shows you that there is an ignorance, even, not without its guilt. Suppose that conscience has been uninstructed as to God's claim and God's judgment—suppose that, not because we could not but because we would not know, we are in midnight tangible darkness as to the things which belong to our peace—is tranquillity justification then? What if the Bible is unread, unpondered, unprayed over—what if the enlightening Spirit is never invoked—what if we are satisfied with the glimmering glow-worm light of nature's dim intuition—dimmer, I had almost said, if left to itself, in Christendom, in Christian England, than anywhere—and will not bow the proud soul before the Shechinah of the Invisible One—is it anything then to say, I know nothing against myself, and therefore, therefore, I am justified?

What if the poor heart, which ought to be drinking every day of what the Psalmist calls *the river of God's pleasures*, is just idly taking

as its sufficient authority the voice of prevalent opinion in the world larger or smaller—small at the largest—to which it gives that imposing name? what if our idea of the right and the becoming and the possible be taken, not from God's Word, but from the noisy music of cornet and sackbut and dulcimer, summoning us to one of earth's myriad idol-worships? what if we call that duty which fashion makes so, and that religion which stands in the violent combination of a week of industrious amusement and an hour on the Sunday of listless listening? and if, giving these things, not outraging opinion either in its decencies or (for it has them) in its devotions, we then come before God with the assurance of a satisfied conscience, to claim the crown of eternity as we have already drunk to their dregs the pleasures of time—will it avail us then to say, I know nothing by myself, and hereby, by this self-ignorance, I am justified?

One other supposition must be made—alas! but too probably—concerning the tranquillity which is no justification: and that rests upon our experience of the deceitfulness of sin. We have spoken thus far rather of negatives; but

how shall we forget, for ourselves or for others, that sort of self-confidence which is the growth, the gradual growth, of habits of sinning? Who has not, for a few days at least of the most blameless life, *suffered a sin upon him*? Where is he, who has never allowed a sinful wish to become a lawless desire—has never pondered with himself as lovely the thing that is forbidden—has never fallen into some habit which, mercifully delivered, he feels to have been a snare of the devil? I put my enquiry delicately—I might urge it far, far more pointedly; but it is enough—enough to press upon you this further question—Were you not fertile to discover, brave to assert, at such times, the excusableness, the almost innocence, of that wrong wish, desire, habit, which now you call by its name? Supposing that at that period, under that influence, you had been questioned as to the state of your conscience, do you think that you would have allowed it then to be very restless, very importunate? Might you not have been tempted almost to say, if man, yes, if God, questioned you, I know nothing by myself? and yet would you, could you, thereby have been justified?

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This experience is yours, on purpose—for there is an overruling Hand even in our sins—on purpose to make you aware how much, and how little, you can trust conscience itself to be your accuser or else your justifier. There is an influence which seats itself even upon the conscience. Strong passion is such an influence. Strong passion once or twice yielded to is doubly, tenfold such. A man under an overmastering inclination is almost a man without a conscience. If he dares to say, *I know nothing by myself*, I will loudly thunder in his ear, *Yet am I not hereby justified*. And, remember, in these matters, we fall not all at once, but little by little !

This reflection we would press even upon Christian people. Some make assurance everything. Some deny the reality of grace where there is not the confidence of salvation. Some must know from you the day and the hour—the voice which spake with you, and *which way went the Spirit* after speaking. All this is a jargon of unscriptural phrases, often condemned by Ezekiel's test of doctrine—that it makes the heart of the righteous sad, and strengthens in the same degree the hands of the

wicked. Learn of St. Paul a holier and a truer lesson. Be contented to wait for assurance till the goal of your race is full in view. Meanwhile be humble. Say—if you can say it—but who shall give the note? *I know nothing by myself.* Yet with that saying still couple the converse—*But God is greater than my heart, and He alone knoweth all things.* Enough for comfort, not enough for presumption—light to walk by, not to bask in—everything with sobriety, nothing with foolhardiness—such, such be my life! At last I shall have attained—and then!

2. We are ready now for St. John.

It is meant that we should be humble—it is not meant that we should be morbid. There is danger of presumption—there is a risk also of depression. If we took by itself the caution that conscience might not accuse and yet we not be justified, there might be a spirit of self-suspicion aroused in us, scarce more fatal to peace than destructive of holiness.

God would not have us live a life of feverish anxiety. The Gospel is like that breath from the four winds, of which a Prophet tells, which



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carries into the whole of this dry, sapless, lifeless being, that stir and movement and thrill of vitality which is at once the signal of the change and the witness of the Author. This would be lost again if there were no experience ever of God's love communicated, and of the love of God returned. The Christian who is forbidden to presume, warned to be cautious, spurred, goaded, to constant self-enquiry, is yet animated by the promise that, walking in the light, he shall assure his heart before God—that, if his heart condemns him not, he is justified, he is accepted, he has peace with God.

Nothing is more unprofitable, nothing more indolent, than that unrestful unhopeful spirit, which has been the torment of some Christian souls. Without quietness there is no working. Without peace there is no progress. A man working for salvation is but half diligent: it is he who works *from* salvation, works because saved, he, he is the man who produces the fruit that abides. He, whether sower or reaper, is the workman that needeth not to be ashamed; God, his own God, gives him His blessing.

Most unattractive to them that are without

is the gospel of the down-hearted. They see that it has not made him happy; then the magnet for them has lost its attraction, because what makes them think at all of Christ is His saying, *I will give you rest.* He has not given this man rest, and yet he is a Christian !

The life of the self-mistruster is an oscillation, not a progress—a vertigo, not an advance. God wills our peace. *Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence.* How wise, how judicious, how salubrious !

What does St. John say as to the conditions—let me rather say, the antecedents—of this comfort? You need not travel beyond this third chapter.

There is, first, a firm hold of the Gospel sonship. *Beloved, now are we the sons of God.* A man must grasp this. He must say, God is my Father. I did not make him so—nothing done by me, nothing felt by me, made Him so. No man, by willing or by doing, ever earned to himself a father; nor can any man, by will or by deed, make God anything that He is not. The prodigal in the far country—was not that, or is not that, you?—spoke of his Father still

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though he was an exile, and when he thought of going to him it was a returning, it was to a home!

Again, there must be an entire openness with God. We must *walk in the light* at least in this sense. We must have no secrets with God. If you have sinned, tell him. There cannot be confidence in the sense of trust where there is no confidence in the other sense—of frankness. Let God know all your secrets—well, He knows them; but, for all that, He *will be enquired of*—He will be confided in!

Then, thirdly, there must be a life of love. *Hereby we know that we are of the truth.* How? Because we love—not in word only, but in deed. As God laid down life for us—wonderful words!—so must we for the brethren. The Gospel grace gives us new relationships—we must live them. *If our heart condemn us* in this respect—that we love not, or love only in name, not in reality—then we must remember that *God is greater than our heart*—that God knows that which we have forgotten, which we have not found out; that just self-condemnation, Oh, how predictive it is of

Another's! that misgiving of the soul because we love not, what shall it become when the light of Omniscience is cast upon it?

The closing lesson for us all is, Become Christians indeed.

Grasp the Gospel saying, God loves—God is love. Take it home. Say to yourself, Then, if this be true—strange as it may seem—God loves *me*. Loves me as I am. Loves me a sinner. Loves before I love—loves afterwards. When I love not, He loves. He bids me believe in His love—and if I believe, I live. He bids me reflect His love—and if I will, I can do it. I can love the brethren. He bids me open myself to Him—kneel down, and tell Him thy secrets! It will be life to thee when, instead of having an Observer always present, thou hast a Friend. A Friend, who changes not with thy changes, but loves thee still—loves through all—loves till thou love—and afterwards, for ever.

The Gospel is a great salvation. It goes to the root of this being. It goes through all—satisfying every want—filling every capacity. Let it not play around thee, like the cold moon-beam, glittering, but unfertilizing—let it be thy sun, thy day, thy life!

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We are keeping Advent. To-day we are entering upon an Ember Week—a week of Ordinations. I have made the Epistle my text, with this thought in my heart. For the first time there go forth from this Temple not lawyers only, but clergymen too. They will associate their latest preparation with this solemn, this ancient Church. I bespeak for them your sympathy, your thought, your prayer. Rejoice, for the Church's sake, rejoice for England's sake, rejoice for Christ's sake, that the Lord of the harvest sends forth some labourers from amongst *you*. I ask for them this boon, this blessing—that you will add one word, in their behalf, to your own prayers to God this night, this day!

## II.

### GO, AND SIN NO MORE.\*

Go, and sin no more.—JOHN viii. 11.

INSIDE the porch-door of a beautiful Church in the north of England, is engraven the inscription of the text. It serves to remind the dispersing worshippers that, as *Praying is the end of preaching*, so the object of both, the aim of all worship, is that *holiness without which no man shall see the Lord*.

Let us, my brethren, assembled on the last Sunday of a dying year, print the same maxim, not on a tablet of stone, but on the more tenacious record of a repentant heart.

*Go, and sin no more.*

The hand of criticism, ancient and modern, has busied itself about the history which the text

\* December 26, 1869.

closes. From some of the most ancient Manuscripts, Versions, and Commentaries, the whole section from the last verse of chapter vii. to the 11th verse of chapter viii. is entirely wanting. The discourse of Jesus as the Light of the world is joined on to that debate in the Sanhedrim which is closed by the altercation with Nicodemus.

It is quite easy to understand, from the most modern experience, how a timidity more weak than culpable, a jealousy for the supposed interests of morality, and an anxiety to screen Christ's Gospel from the infidel's scoffing, might operate together, to strike out from the pages of Scripture a narrative in which Christ is represented as saying to a very sinful woman, *Neither do I condemn thee.* It is easy, I say, to account for the *omission* of the section—it is by no means easy to account for its *insertion*. If it were not an original portion of God's Word, by what daring hand was it fabricated and foisted in—or how shall we explain its acceptance, from the third or fourth century, through all these ages, and by all the Churches, as an integral part of the inspired Book?

We hear sometimes of a *verifying faculty* to which, as to a sort of spiritual taste, Revelation itself makes its appeal for a hearing in man's conscience. I question whether any ten or twelve verses of Scripture could appeal with more confidence to a tribunal thus constituted.

Doubts, indeed, might arise as to the exact place which they ought to occupy in this Gospel—or, if a microscopic scrutiny of phrases and particles be indulged in, doubts even whether the author of these verses were St. John or St. Luke. The conjecture might, even, be tolerated that, having been originally one of those *many other* deeds and words of Jesus of which St. John says, in the last verses of his Gospel that the world itself could scarcely contain them if all were written, this incident was handed down at first among those precious reminiscences to which it must have been so charming to listen in the table-talk of Peter or Andrew or John, and only at a later time interwoven among the written records of the Gospel by the same Providence which has watched over the sacred deposit of the faith once for all delivered.

But indeed, when you look into it, does it not



find a fitting receptacle in the very niche assigned to it? Does it not appropriately preface a discourse in which Christ says, *Ye judge after the flesh: I judge no man*; and again, *Which of you*—convicted though ye be by your own consciences—*yet which of you convinceth me of sin?*

Jesus has had a long day's battling, and another like day is before Him. For that gradual self-manifestation which first wrought in attracting, has, in this advanced stage of His ministry, become more and more each year an offence and a division.

When others disperse to their homes—the fierce Sanhedrim, the baffled officers, the incredulous multitude—He, the homeless One, He who always gives, never receives—finds His nightly retirement on the slopes of Olivet,\* there to refresh Himself by prayer and self-discipline for the sorrows and conflicts in store for Him from His own. Such is the framework and setting of the narrative before us.

Early in the morning He returns, as was His

\* "Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with His disciples" (John xviii. 2).

wont, to the Temple-courts—and there the malice of His enemies has devised for Him a new form of trial.

With ears open to any tale of scandal, and hearts ingenious in the malevolent use of it, they bring before Him a guilty woman—for of the fact of the guilt there seems to have been no question—and would involve Him in a grave dilemma by the question, *Moses said thus—What sayest thou?* Either He must disparage the law of the theocracy, or He may involve Israel in a dispute with Rome. Either He must exhibit a sternness alien to His character, or He must reveal a laxity perilous to morals. It was one of those crises in His ministry which made severe proof of Him.

And now let us mark, in a very few leading particulars, the manifold wisdom of His dealing. It is indeed a marvellous lesson in the school both of man and God.

Let us pass in review three or four of those moral forces or powers which God has made prevalent over His creatures. Let us see Christ employing each of these, by turns, in the difficult struggle which He here wages with the spirit-hordes of darkness.

i. There is, first, the power of Silence. Challenged to give judgment—to interfere decisively in a case not before Him—He stoops and writes on the ground with his finger. How natural to marvel, with many Christian interpreters, what it was that He wrote! Natural, but vain. Was it, perhaps, that new law of forbearance, of humility, of Christian love, by which He purposed, in due time, at once to fulfil and to supersede the old? God wrote once (some one says) in the Old Testament—*written with the finger of God* is the expression—and Christ wrote once in the New. Or was it rather significant of the miserable futility of that antagonism, of which a prophet says that the names of God's enemies are *written in the earth*? It is enough for us to accept the simpler gloss of our Authorized Version, which adds, in italics, the explanatory words, *as though He heard them not*. It was intended as a marked silence—intended to bring them to those reflections and self-questionings which should precede, in fallen man, every utterance of judgment, and so to awaken those *compunctious visitings* which might even issue

in a repentance not to be repented of. It was an example of the power, as elsewhere of speech, so here of silence.

Would you bring to self-recollection a petulant child, an angry, unreasonable, insolent man?—be silent. Would you shame the scurrilous, the profane, the licentious talker; would you put down the utterer of a libertine jest, or the retailer of an unbecoming story, or the idle trifler with some sacred topic, or the impertinent scoffer at some text of the Bible?—far better than any rebuke, than any argument, will be a grave, a serious silence. Jesus Himself used this weapon, when, goaded to speak, He just wrote with His finger as though He heard not.

And is not this power of silence the very weapon which God uses with those who challenge Him by their sins? *Strong and patient—provoked every day*; it is only *if a man will not turn* that *He whets His sword*. It is thus that He has made us ashamed of ourselves a thousand times! It is thus—by making His sun rise upon us each day with its healing, life-giving comfort—by continuing to the unthankful and the evil every blessing of life and breath and

all things—by making (so to say) *as though He heard not*, and suffering us unchecked and unmolested to walk in our own way even when it is evil—it is thus—it is by His silence—that God moves the rebel heart to submit itself, and draws from the perverse soul at last that answer of hope, *Surely God is about my path, and I knew it not!*

2. But there is another power which God uses, without which this would be idle and impotent. That other power is Conscience.

There is a limit to silence. Speech at last must replace it. *When they continue asking Him*, He rose from his stooping posture, and spoke—spoke one single sentence; gave no answer to their demand for His judgment; neither ratified nor yet impugned the law of Moses; decided neither for nor against the guilt of the accused; but said only these memorable words, *He that is without sin among you, let him first cast the stone*, the fatal stone, at her. This was the office of the witness in a capital trial. The mention of it might remind them that they were not witnesses—that this was no regular trial—that He was not on earth

the legal judge. But the point and force of the answer lay in the first words—*He that is without sin among you.*

It might be otherwise in official judgments. If law is ever to assert itself, it must have human magistrates ; and a human magistrate cannot be without sin. Even a human judge, in so far as he is a sinner, is disqualified for his office. It is a terrible thing to hear a man of loose life utter the voice of moral indignation, and give to death, even ministerially, a fellow-being not worse (save by accident) than himself. A lawyer who is to bear any part in the machine of judicature, ought to be as moral, as pure, as any clergyman.

But in the case now in question the process was entirely extra-judicial. This poor sinner is not upon her trial ; they are but self-constituted accusers. The whole thing is neither hither nor thither as regards the ends of justice. The lesson taught by Christ is not so much for magistrates ; it is for the tatlers and busy-bodies who infest society with their scandals. It may be necessary that even a sinner, even a profligate, if misfortune has made him a judge, should pronounce an inconsistent, a self-condemning sentence ; it

ought to abase him in the dust, yet it is his duty as well as his reproach. But it is never necessary that private, voluntary, gratuitous judgments should be uttered ; it is never necessary that the sins and crimes of others should be dragged into discussion in social circles, or that characters should be defamed where there is neither evidence to convict nor tribunal to sentence. Well were it if a watch were set to keep the door of our lips from such condemnations, by the perpetual reminder, *He that is without sin among you, let him first cast the stone of judgment !*

The appeal was to conscience. Christ knew that in each of those men, hard and self-sufficient as they were, God had placed that strange, unaccountable monitor which we call, in the language of many nations, the *self-privy*—the fellow-knowledge—the knowledge with some one, that some one being myself. Each one of those harsh, censorious, cruel men—who were at that moment torturing a poor victim for the sake of tempting to His ruin the Lord of glory—each one of them had within him a record, a history, a life behind and before, a consciousness (could it but find its voice) of things

done and left undone—each one, could he but be made to think, knew himself a condemned man at the bar of God—had broken the law which was to be his judge, and was on his way to that inevitable trial which alone is really one of life and death.

Christ invoked this power, and let it work. Again He stooped and wrote. He would not even watch the countenances, nor quicken by the gaze of that calm, that piercing eye, the action of the self-consciousness upon the hearts within.

But that action was (as we speak) magical. *He that is without sin among you.* He does not say *what* sin. He does not say, such sin as this which you are indicting. He leaves to each the individualizing, the particularizing process. And yet we dare to say that the very sin then in question was the sin which, in one form, in one degree or another, does find out ninety and nine consciences in every hundred! We dare to say that for a hundred men who could with calm conscience cast the first stone at a thief or murderer, you will scarce find one who, with the law of God explained to him in its



application to thought as well as deed, could step forth to do the executioner's office upon the particular kind of sin here in question.

One by one, beginning with the elder—with those who might have seemed likely to be the most free from such sins, but who, just because they have the longer length of years behind them, are precisely those whose hearts are dyed the deepest in the guilty memory—one by one, convicted by conscience, they rise and slink away—glad to escape the intuition of the eye, when they are already pierced through and through by the penetration of the voice. *From the eldest to the last* they are not innocent: they cannot accept the challenge—no, not one of them—to throw the fatal stone.

It is the power of conscience.

We have spoken of two powers, unequal but real, exemplified in this narrative. Let us add, more briefly, yet two besides.

3. The power of Holiness. Can you imagine the awe, the shame of that moment, when at length, time having been given for the withdrawal of the self-convicted tempters, Jesus lifts up Himself from His writing, and sees none but

the woman? You perceive the instant effect upon her of finding herself in His holy presence. The eyes of those hard bad men removed, feeling reasserts itself. Reverence breathes in the answer: *No man, Lord.* The long-dormant conscience, in her also, is re-awakened; there is no angry, injured, defiant self-exculpation, as of one who would say, *My punishment is greater than the offence. I was weak. I was tempted. I was sore put to it. I was not the tempter.* Such palliations might have been in her heart, on her lips, when she was dragged thither: they are silent now. She feels herself in the presence of One who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity—of One who knows that no sin is truly slight or venial; and that no compulsion, whether of persuasion or violence, can absolutely overpower the will, or constrain the act of sinning. He who has dispersed, by one heart-searching word, the crowd of curious, vulgar, prying accusers, yet has in Himself that alone secret of command over the criminal—the might of an immaculate virtue. Now she is at the bar of perfect purity: you can see how she recognizes His right, how she awaits, with abso-

lute submission, the utterance of His sentence and of her doom. She stays behind when the accusers disperse themselves. No prison-doors confine, no enchaining fetters bind her—the eye of Christ himself was till now fastened elsewhere—yet the Presence, felt in her soul, keeps her motionless: now she is on her trial, not though, but because, she is alone with Jesus.

We must all, one day, be standing in like manner, yet with more instant consequences, before the judgment-seat of Christ—alone, though a world be round us: that presence will derive its chief awe, not from elements melting with heat, not from the Archangel's trumpet, not from reanimated forms of long-buried dead—but from this—that the Judge is the Holy One—tempted once, in all points, even as we—yet without sin!

4. Finally, we have before us in this closing verse of the history the power of Divine Love. *Neither do I condemn thee.* The sentence of acquittal is less positive, you may say, the exhibition of Divine Love in the same degree less tender, than in another like narrative preserved for us by St. Luke. There, certainly, there was

a more decisive evidence of a repentant, a chastened, a believing mind—and the tone of the absolution was proportionately emphatic. But it is love which speaks in both—and in both with power. *Thy sins are forgiven thee—go in peace. Neither do I condemn thee—go, and sin no more.* The one is the promise of a justifying peace—the other is the mandate of a sanctifying grace.

Which has more of love in it—rightly understood? He whom Christ forgives goes in peace: he whom Christ condemns not goes to sin no more. They are but opposite sides of the same great salvation: he who has one has both. *Stretch forth thy hand to whether thou wilt.*

Take, then, for this Sunday of mid-winter, this latest worship of a closing year, the thought breathed for you in the text: Jesus condemns not—go, and sin no more.

God has made it natural to us to note the flight of time. In the beginning He set *lights in the firmament of the heaven, for signs and for seasons, and for days and years.* To some these vicissitudes are but mementos of buried joys and hopes dissipated. In every congrega-

tion there are those for whom Christmas is become a day of darkness: so vacant the once-peopled home, so many more, to them, the dead than the surviving. They are tempted to look, half in envy, half in pity, upon the merriment which is no longer for them.

But there is one point at which all may meet—the joyous for needful sobering, the mournful for quickening hope—and that point of union is the great Infinite Love. All have sins, which they need to wash away:—it was in days of feasting that a Patriarch of old feared most for his children, lest perhaps they should *have sinned and cursed God in their hearts*—so well did he know the narrowness of the margin between enjoyment and selfishness, between amusement and ingratitude, between fulness of pleasure and a spirit of discontent. At such times not least do we need the help of prayer and watchfulness, of self-recollection and Divine grace. Remember, and forget not, the sad relapses, the shameful falls, by which, in days that are past, you have displeased and dishonoured God. Take into your hearts that blessed sentence of absolution from all your sins,

which is the very kernel and marrow of the Gospel. Hear Christ saying to you, with reference to the time past of your life, *Neither do I condemn thee.* Let the power of that Divine Love constrain you. Let it say within you, as in thousands of souls in all lands and times, *I will run the way of Thy commandments,* now that *Thou hast set my heart at liberty.* His love shed abroad in my heart shall quicken, shall kindle mine. Every joy shall be received as from Him—in every pleasure I will ask Him to be with me as my Guest, my Host, my Friend. Every sorrow too shall be brightened by His smile—for shall I receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall I not receive evil?

Go forth, then, to sin no more! Blessed is he who so much as listens to the voice that thus speaks with him! O there is a dignity, there is an elevation, in the very *resolution* (in the name of God) against evil; He who determines, in God's House, in Christ's strength, to-day, against that indolence, that weakness, that folly, that indulgence, that vice, which has bound him heretofore—he who brings it, as it were by

name, to Christ the Judge, praying Him, of His boundless love, to condemn and to execute *it*, so that He may never have to condemn and execute *him*—praying Him to bring into his soul His winnowing fan to sever in him the chaff from the wheat, and to make him, in this coming year, what Scripture calls a new creature in Christ—in that man a good work is begun, and He who hath begun is faithful also to finish. God grant, in this Congregation, this day, many such beginnings of grace; and impress deeply upon us, to be the very life of days to come, the two parts of Christ's heavenly benediction—*Go forth forgiven—Go, to sin no more!*

### III.

## AN ENEMY HATH DONE THIS.\*

An enemy hath done this.—MATT. xiii. 28.

**I**T is not every year that this Gospel is read in our Churches. Its next recurrence will be in the year 1876. Which of us may be present to hear it then?

We may regret that the Parable is not read in the Sunday Gospel with its interpretation. The arrangers of our Liturgy might have combined the two without serious difficulty. Nevertheless, the explanation is not far to seek. If God give us the grace, we will look for it, and find it, to-day.

The most general, cursory view of the Parable presents to us a scene of intermixture and of confusion. The picture is that of a field with

\* February 6, 1870.



two kinds of seed sown in it—the one by a friendly, the other by a hostile hand. And this confusion is not to be remedied: it is to be borne. The two must grow together—it cannot be helped—until the harvest. The mischief is done; it is irreparable. Irreparable till the time come—a time which is God's, not man's.

Now we can imagine that the first hearers of this Parable would suppose it to refer to the intermixture of Christians with a world of Jews and heathens. In days when a Christian might find himself invited, not only to a heathen table, but to an idol feast—when your next neighbour in the street might be a worshipper of Jupiter, and your own father or brother might be daily blaspheming that holy name by which you are called—it might seem most obvious to understand the Parable of the Tares as bidding you to acquiesce in this confusion; reminding you that your business is not to go out of the world, but to use without abusing it; and bringing to mind also that great final interposition by which God Himself shall at last vindicate His ways to man.

When you look more closely into the Parable, you will see that its chief lesson is for times

later and quite different. It is *the kingdom of heaven* itself which is like this sown field. *The field is the world*; but that is 'only because the Church itself is world-wide. This is one of the marks of the Divine self-confidence of our Lord; of his conviction that His Gospel is œcumenical in design, and shall one day be so in act; that the knowledge of God in Christ shall one day fill the earth with its glory, even as the waters cover the sea. It is inside therefore, it is not outside, the Church that we are to look for the mixture and confusion prophesied. It is not the Church which is the seed, and the world which is the tares: it is within the baptized community that we are to expect the one and the other. The tares look like the wheat. It is in the fruit, it is not in the blade, that the difference shows itself. The fear of a premature severance lies not only in that disturbance of the soil, which might expose or chill the healthy root, but still more in that mistaking of the one for the other, which might lead to a plucking up of the good along with, or instead of, the counterfeit. Not until the world and the Church became seriously intermixed by

the creation of a large nominal and political Christendom, did this Parable come into full operation either in its warning or in its counsel.

When at length, in the fulness of time, Christians began to read here the record written beforehand of their experience and duty, was it not, ought it not to have been, full of admonition, full of encouragement?

On the one hand, it forbade, it ought to have prevented, that sort of disappointment which arises from confusing the two things—failure and imperfection. The results of the Gospel are real, though they are not yet complete. A work is not the less a work, because there is a counter-work beside it. Two forces may even balance each other, and that equilibrium may be a witness to the strength of each. It is not the less true that Christ is a Saviour, because many will not come to Him in that character. It is no argument against the power of grace, that men, not seeking it, do not receive. It is no proof that vital Christianity is nowhere, to say that it is not everywhere; that many profess and call themselves Christians, for one (if it were so) who holds the faith in its consistent

might of holiness. Christ foresaw, Christ foretold, that this would be so—that amongst the good seed, which denotes the children of the kingdom, there would be a plentiful growth of spurious plants—whether in the form of unbelief or of ungodliness, of secret infidelity or practical hypocrisy. There is no defeating of the Gospel in this—for He who brought the Gospel foretold it.

On the contrary, this must be accepted as a fact, and dealt with as a difficulty.

It is an experience, painful in proportion to our own earnestness, that no community can be so sifted by discipline, or so narrowed by exclusiveness, as to contain only the good. It has been tried, age after age: scarce one of our thousand sects but had this for its apology—the desire to be pure. Let us go apart by ourselves, they said, into some corner of the world-wide field, where, by anxious use of spade and hoe, we may be clear and safe from these tares. We will not suffer the spark of Divine grace, as it flashes along the wire of human sympathy, to find one particle missing or irresponsible—each shall be true, or all will be false. Again and

again it has been found that the rooting up of the tares has been either incomplete or mischievous: the dream of present perfection has been found chimerical; and men have been sent back to Christ to learn a truer, because humbler, wisdom, in His words, *Let both grow together until the harvest.*

I know not that this maxim has ever been felt to forbid a reasonable exercise of discipline. Certainly our Church does not—certainly the Church of the Apostles did not—thus interpret it. Only two things must be said of it—first, that discipline ought to have in view the restoration, not the condemnation, of the offender—the awakening in others of a spirit of watchfulness and godly fear, not the fostering of a fallacious hope that any discernment or any severity can guarantee the purity of that which remains. Secondly, that if, in any age or Church, discipline is by circumstances precluded, not on that account has the community lost its standing as a portion of the Church universal, inasmuch as Christ foretold concerning His kingdom the intermingling of the good and the evil, and expressly forbade, in the present, the attempt to discriminate and to judge.

Boldly, then, would we assert the right of each man to be taken on his profession, and to pass through life to his grave unchallenged regarding his Christianity. While he lives, he shall worship with the believing; he shall hear, week by week, the Gospel of hope; he shall kneel at these altar-rails to partake of the bread and of the cup of blessing. Each act, each event, each joy and each sorrow of his pilgrimage shall be consecrated, if he will accept it, by some suitable office of an Apostolical Ministry. When the last hour arrives, he shall call for the elders of the Church, and they shall pray over him that his sins may be forgiven: even the lifeless body shall be committed to no unhallowed resting-place, nor left there without the appropriate words of Christian hope and evangelical blessing.

Thus broadly, thus boldly, would we interpret the words—

*Nay, lest, while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them—*

*Let both grow together until the harvest.*

1. But these matters might seem rather to belong to legislators and theologians: we are

concerned to-day with matters humbler and more practical. Our part of the Parable is not so much the permission to grow—it is rather the warning that this permitted growth is ambiguous as to its results.

An enemy has been busy in God's field; he has the counterfeit seed, as Christ has the real. Nowhere does the good Sower carry His basket but the watchful foe follows Him in the night. The seed here is not true doctrine and false; that might have suited the Parable of the Sower, but in the Parable of the Tares the seed is something different. The figures of Christ are plastic and ductile. On His lips *seed* did not always mean one thing, any more than the figures of building or regeneration. The seed of this Parable is not word, but character; not a Gospel and its counterfeit, but true Christians and false.

There is yet one other thought, without which the Parable would be read inaccurately. It is not that either the good Sower or the bad sows his characters mature and unchangeable. Some say that even in the figure employed there is implied more of developement and deterioration

than of original radical diversity ; that the tares are a depravation of the wheat, and not a different genus or species of seed in the sowing. Certainly in the interpretation we must guard against any unscriptural notion of a foregoing reprobation, such as should make a human being from the first, whether by nature or by some irresistible decree, a child of the devil as much in the sowing as in the growth or the reaping. However it may be in physics, certainly it is true in things spiritual, that a man may pass over from wheat to tares, or from tares to wheat, and that no one is by compulsion either the one or the other.

But it is with the great broad fact that we are concerned to-day. In the great world in which we are lost, in the little world in which each one of us has a place and a part, there are influences at work—personal influences—of which our Lord here says that they are due not to God but to God's enemy. And these personal influences not only work, but must work : they form a large part of man's trial, of man's discipline for eternity : they have also, themselves, a right to their own trial, a right to time and



space, to action and opportunity :—who knows but that even they may turn themselves and live? God sends His rain and His sunshine upon the evil and upon the good, and He requires of His own children that they precipitate not the ruin of the children of the wicked one.

None the less the influence is real and disastrous. You cannot live in town or village, you cannot open a book or a newspaper, you cannot even sit still and let events come to you, without some sorrowful experience of this presence of evil. Sometimes you ask yourself, Is this God's world? Is this Christ's Church? Could the power of evil be so strong, could the corruption of grace be so virulent, if God were still reigning, if the Gospel had ever been true?

We see a man of great capacity, known in youth for academical distinction, having the world before him as the arena of his manly energies, absolutely lost and flung away through some overmastering lust or passion. We see a beautiful woman, once the inmate of a loving, even of a pure home, now sunk in that last degradation from which there is no return into the loveliness of living. *An enemy hath done*

*this.* God made this powerful mind—God fashioned this beautiful form: did God unmake the one? was it God who disfigured and debased the other? The Parable fears not to say that the Divine sowing has been dogged and spoilt by a hostile—the Sower sowed the good seed, and while men slept an enemy came and sowed tares.

It is scarcely less lamentable to see the same spoiling ruining process in that side-growth and over-growth of weeds which eventually turns a man of many virtues into a specimen and proverb of one fault. He who was so generous that he would give all his goods to feed the poor, could deny nothing to a beggar, would be surety (at the first word of request) for one whom he knew to be a spendthrift, or do any other act of excessive foolish good-nature—is perhaps, as years advance, almost as much through misfortune as vice, altered into a disreputable worthless being, a burden to his friends, a scandal to his name. We look upon these wrecks strewn the shore of life's ocean, and no words rise so readily to our lips in the attempt to describe them as this brief clause of our Saviour's Parable—*An enemy hath done this.*

It is chiefly, however, in one particular aspect that the Parable sets before us this hostile sowing.

There is a danger to the good from the presence, side by side with them, of the evil; a danger especially in this—that the tares look like the wheat, and **make** it impossible for us oftentimes to discriminate them even for avoidance.

The evil are not all evil, nor avowedly evil, nor frightfully evil—many of them: herein lies the danger. Whence have you derived—we might say to one and to another in this audience—the most serious influences of your own life towards what you now see to be wrong? Was it from the grossly immoral, the horribly profane, the odiously selfish, the repulsively sensual? Was it it not rather from him whom you would never have admitted to your intimacy if he had been any one of these things—whose good qualities were so many that you scarcely thought of the bad—who drew you towards him by a kindness, by an affection, which it seemed ingratitude to repulse? Yet when you reflect upon it, he it was who lulled you into a life apathetic towards duty,

at last indifferent to virtue. He it was who by small imperceptible degrees, unconsciously perhaps to himself, moved you across the line which severed (for you) energy from indolence, independence from worldliness, holiness from laxity. He it was who by pleasant banter led you to make a mock at sin, **and** by playful harmless innuendo undermined your faith in prayer and the Bible.

Nay, how often does the voice of purest friendship, of domestic love, become a very Satan to the listener? Who is not urged, each day, to spare himself, to indulge himself, to enervate and relax himself from duty? It was when Peter said, not in bitterness, not in unfriendliness—the very opposite—*Be it far from Thee, Lord*—or, as the more graphic Greek has it, *Pity Thyself, Lord*—it was then that our Lord, feeling doubtless within Himself to the fullest extent the natural, innocent, human shrinking from pain and death, forced from unwilling lips, more for His own sake perhaps than for his Apostle's, those unparalleled words of rebuke, *Get thee behind me, Satan! An enemy, a Satan, hath done this.*

2. That sentence which is in one aspect full of warning, is in another aspect full of consolation. *An enemy hath done this*—if an enemy, then not God!

It is not the abstract thought of the power of evil which exercises the most depressing influence of all upon the heart of a Christian.

Humanity mourns over the reign of sin and death. To see lives spoilt, sufferings prevalent, miseries of mind and soul inflicted upon the upright, snares laid for the innocent, and temptations ingeniously planned for the unsuspecting—to see the earth darkened by abounding wickedness, and *hell* (as the Prophet writes) *enlarging herself without measure* for the reprobate—this is dreadful: a man must be blind and deaf and stupid to be light-hearted amid such sorrows. But the agonizing thought is, Where is God in these things? Is He indifferent, is He sleeping, is He powerless, is He (I speak as a man) in any sense an accomplice, were it but as acquiescent, in all these evils?

The origin of evil we expect not to fathom—we leave it as the mystery, the one mystery, which Revelation itself illuminates not in the

present: it is the *fact* of evil which alone we venture to contemplate—the fact, and perhaps the future—shall evil indeed reign for ever, if not over—it reigns not *now* over—yet side by side with the good? Shall the kingdoms of this world ever become indeed kingdoms of the Lord and of His Christ, not in the mere chaining and punishing of evil, but in the higher and more glorious sense of overcoming evil with good?

There was something almost attractive in that old theory of two co-ordinate principles, a good and an evil, fighting it out, all along the ages, in a hand-to-hand struggle. At least it gave some reality to God's holiness—to His concern in the putting down of evil—to His personal interest in the recovery and restoration of the fallen. Like all human inventions, like all helps and appliances to Divine Revelation, it had its weakness and its unsatisfactoriness also: it went not quite to the heart of the question: it reconciled not, could not reconcile, the Omnipotence with the Love.

And some men have presumed to say that of all God's attributes they think least of the

Power—they had rather think of Him as limited in strength, than as deficient in holiness, or wisdom, or mercy. They had rather believe that evil was too strong for Him, than that, having the power, He lacked the will, to extirpate it.

My brethren, in all these speculations we are out of our depth. When we calmly speak of surrendering one of God's attributes—in other words, one of those ingredients, the sum of which is our idea of God—we are not only making ourselves wise above what is written, but wise too with a wisdom which must be foolishness with God. We cannot thus take and give, keep or surrender, in matters so immensely far above out of our sight.

But I do account it a cause for deep thankfulness, that Christ our Lord, while giving no encouragement to speculations futile or presumptuous, here teaches us so decisively to disconnect all evil from the hand of God. *An enemy hath done this.* The existence of evil, the origination of evil, the working of evil, is all disjoined and severed from the operation, from the will, from the mind and presence of God. Evil is God's absence. His enemy came

and sowed. Strange, you will say, that God should anywhere be absent—that an enemy should so much as be—far more, work, Strange, we echo the words—strange, unaccountable, inconceivable. *If I climb to heaven, Thou art there—if I go down to hell, Thou art there also.* Nevertheless, reason and religion concur in binding us to this axiom—All good is of God—all good—only good—and no evil. You need not be away from God: He wills not absence from you: be with Him, set Him always before you, and you need fear no evil. *An enemy hath done this*—and the enemy comes not nigh where God is. Be sure that, if anything whatever is at this moment drawing you towards evil, that thing is not of God. It may be something in some one whom God has put near you—whom God has set in your home—whom God has brought nigh to you for your love; and yet that thing, even in him, which is enticing you towards evil, is not of God, is against the will of God: *an enemy hath done this.* Resist, and he will flee from you—for strong as he is, he is weaker than God—even the strong man armed is no match for Jesus.



Living in this faith—the Omnipotence of the All-Good; dying in this faith—the ultimate triumph, the eventual explanation, the future refreshing, the final restoration, the everlasting home, the saints' rest, the peace of God; your heart shall stand fast, you shall fear no evil. *My flesh and my heart faileth—but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.*

#### IV.

### WHAT IS THIS THAT THOU HAST DONE?\*

What is this that thou hast done?—GEN. iii. 13.

**S**IN is in all hearts always: the subject of sin is uppermost in many hearts to-day. The approaching holy season suggests it. Circumstances of a very opposite kind force it upon our attention. If there be in God's Word a warning or an encouragement concerning it, never was it more opportune: never could it fall surely upon opener ears, upon minds more inquisitive, upon hearts more awe-struck to listen.

And God has such a word for us; has opened His Revelation for us this morning at a chapter full of explanation—illuminating, harmonizing, instructing, admonishing, all in one; bids us

\* February 20, 1870.

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hearken; promises us, if there be an ear to hear, doctrine and reproof, correction, education in righteousness.

On the great festival of Christmas Day you were asked to notice how every revelation may be either a mystery, or an explanation of mysteries, according to the state of mind in which it finds us. Difficult, inscrutable as the cardinal truth of the Incarnation is in itself, it was shown, on that occasion, to have in it an answer of light and peace to minds perplexed and baffled by the apparent contradiction of the Divine and the Human present in one Person in Jesus Christ. In like manner, open as the doctrine of the Fall may be to the scoffs and taunts of the unbeliever, it also is a mere relief and comfort to hearts tossed hither and thither by the experience of a world full of sin, and the instinct of a God perfectly holy. Around each and every revelation, indeed, there lies, and must lie, a fringe and border of mysteries unsolved, of riddles unread. To the end of time the existence of evil, the origination of evil, will be a thought and a wonder big with perplexity. Yet does each several revelation, that of the

Fall not least, explain something, harmonize something, push further back the horizon of knowledge, and hold further and further into the chambers of darkness the torch of truth, which is the candle of the Lord.

This third chapter of the Bible is the revelation of the original sin. And that, for the present, in three senses.

1. First, the record before us is the history of the first sin.

It needed no revelation to tell us that sin is, that mankind is sinful. Without, within—around and inside us—is the fact, the experience, the evidence, the presence of sin. It is sin which makes life troublous, and gives death its sting. It is sin which occupies half the time of at least three great Professions—filling gaols, creating diseases, torturing consciences. It is sin which turns beautiful affections into maddening passions: it is sin which makes food excess and drink poison: it is sin which corrupts love into lust, and can make a hell of home. What can I more say? This little is all truism. Carry the thought home. It is sin which makes your life, your daily life, a struggle

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and a battle; matching against one another, in each smallest particular, duty and inclination, virtue and pleasure, religion and indulgence, God and self. If you are to be a good man, you must fight and war for it: if you relax, if you yield, if you fly, you are a coward, a dastard, a renegade, cashiered by yourself. This, too, is of sin. If you die beaten, it scarcely needs Scripture—conscience will suffice—to tell you that you are a lost man.

All this is not revelation—this is experience. This tradition of evil, this handing down of sinful inclination, this transmission from age to age of crimes and punishments, of miseries and ruins, is a fact quite as evident without a Bible as with it. Every one knows that a child left to himself will grow up a plague to himself and to his neighbours. Somewhere, somehow, there is a bias and a tendency, not equal towards good and evil, but heavily preponderating towards one—the latter. Education is the cry of humanity, and men know well that education itself is but a help, it is no safeguard of good.

This dark picture, not dark enough (as I have now drawn it) for truth, might have had one

aggravation—would have had it but for this third chapter of Genesis—the added horror of an aboriginal evil. What was there to tell us, without revelation, that man was not created evil? How should we have known for certain—and doubt in this matter is adverse knowledge—that God did not create us as we are—with this predisposition to evil, with this proclivity towards everlasting death? How should we have been assured that evil is not part of us—a primary, an integral part of the constitution which we must keep or not be? Where would have been the conviction of the possibility of perfection—of a state in which man, dispossessed and emancipated, shall be seen sitting at the feet of his natural Lord, clothed and tranquillized and in his right mind?

All this the revelation of the Fall gives to us, because it tells of an entrance, of an inburst of evil into a world all good, into a being created upright—tells therefore of a nature capable of purity, of an enemy that may be expelled, and a holiness possible because natural.

The Fall is the record of a first sin. This liability, this tendency, this habit of sinning,

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once was not. Let imagination expatiate in that scene of beautiful innocence, which God designed and man flung away. *An enemy hath done this.* Whence he came we know not. We infer from man's fall a fall earlier yet and more mysterious. There must have been a sin yet more ancient than the first sin, into the mysteries of which it is idle to pry, because we cannot know without God, and God has not revealed. For man and man's world, it is enough to know that once sin was not; and that, when it entered, it entered under an influence independent, not inherent. That which so entered may be cast out: the whole volume of Scripture, from its third page onward, is occupied in the stirring martial history of the campaign, the battle, and the victory.

2. The first sin is also, in the next place, the specimen sin. It is in this sense too the original sin, that all other sins are copies of it.

It might have answered some great purposes—already slightly glanced at—to have said, in so many words, *Man was created upright, and man afterwards fell.* But this is not the method of Holy Scripture anywhere.

The Bible is, before all else, a narrative and a history. Instead of dry details of doctrine, it gives us a series of pictures. It speaks with us as with children, holding up the glass to conscience, and mirroring in it the sayings and doings, the conflicts and escapes, the defeats and victories, of men just such as we are.

So is it here. There are particulars in this story of which we may say, if so it strikes us, that they must be allegorical, and not literal. It may be so. If to any mind it suggests itself as incredible that articulate speech should have come from a serpent, or that the fruit of a tree should have formed the subject-matter, the sign and sacrament, of a fatal temptation, then be it so—put your own gloss upon God's record—learned men, I know, and good men, in all ages, have done so; suppose that there is a veil of figure thrown over the action, and imagine under it, if you will, a more ethereal scene and a more magnificent material. For ourselves, believing that nothing is really greater than the most simple—that it signifies not wherein, whether in larger matters or smaller, whether in plucking a berry or in grasping an empire,



fidelity is tried, inasmuch as *he that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much*, and the converse—we may be content to take it almost as it stands: the scene a garden, the test a prohibited tree, the tempter a spirit in serpent-form, the punishment an expulsion into a wilderness forlorn and disconsolate.

Be this as it may, be the scenery literal or parabolical, at all events the temptation was a real temptation, and its steps are as true to life as graphic in the description.

I appeal to the consciences of many before me. There are those here present who have actually sinned. I bid them follow me as I follow Scripture, in tracing and tracking the steps by which they fell. May God give power and energy to the Word, and though the bow must be drawn at a venture, yet may He, in Almighty love, guide the arrow to its mark!

(1) There is first, then, as the preliminary to each act of transgression—and most of all, to that great critical act of transgression by which a young life first sullies its virtue—the pondering of the insidious question, *Yea, hath God said?* The very voice which questions should

alarm. It is an alien voice, strangely breaking in, oftentimes, upon the habitual soul's life, even as it were a serpent speaking with man's tongue. Something says to me, Think of that pleasant vice, so easy, so delicious—of which you read in yesterday's newspaper, which that last new novel, that last night's play, so attractively, so delicately hinted—hath God really said, *Thou shalt not*? Did not some friend the other day laugh at you for your scruple? Do not even older men—do not, alas! even some (so called) physicians—represent it as harmless, as natural, as healthful? Can it be that God, who implanted these passions, God who made us as we are, set us where we are, surrounded us with these influences and these persuasions, has seriously forbidden that which gives its zest to life, and may cultivate into early beauty some of the tenderest and most exquisite of nature's flowers?

(2) If the question, *Hath God indeed forbidden?* be thus true to human experience as the preliminary step in temptation, there is a no less wonderful exactness in the answer by which it is met. How often does the counter-

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influence, of conscience, of education, of daily prayer, of Christian habit, assert itself in the reply, *Yes, God hath said, Of this particular fruit we may not eat lest we die!* This thing which others do, this thing which the tempter bids me do, is sinful, is wicked, whosoever recommends it. I dare not, I will not, I cannot do it. To do it is to sin against God; to do it is to violate conscience: I dare not, I will not.

It is well. The answer is true; the tone is decided and confident. Yet was there not, perhaps, some secret yielding of the will, in this very converse and parley with the voice—in vouchsafing any argument at all to one who would beguile us with his subtlety? Were it not safer, better, wiser far, instead of arguing, which is entertaining the question, to have taken out on the instant the weapon of All-Prayer, and given myself into the protection of the One stronger than the strong one armed?

(3) See how bold the tempter grows as you reason. Surely he has seen here that half-opening of the door which is his virtual admission? Hear him rejoin, regardless of your clear cold logic—*Ye shall not surely die, and God Him-*

*self knows it!* Think how many before you, age after age, have done this thing, and not suffered. How many a young man, after a short year or two of licence, has settled himself in a home, and lived the rest of his life virtuous! How few, by comparison, bring themselves to open shame, for all the thousands and tens of thousands who taste the forbidden fruit! Nay—thus the temptation grows and intensifies—God Himself knows that the prohibition is a mere name, designed only to keep a check upon licence, to prevent too wide, too luxuriant a growth of mischief, to consult propriety, to secure concealment, to warn you against a scandalous profligacy. He knows that, in reality, it will make a man of you! In the old-fashioned days, in the old-fashioned Book, it was put a little differently: it will make a god of you; *your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods.*

Thus, again and again, in one form and another, independence has been made the bait of sin. The young man ponders with himself the restraints of his home: rules and restrictions, without which home could not be, begin now to fret and gall him like a chain: if he

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could but withdraw himself from this childish bondage—sad to say it, yet true, from this troublesome love—he would be a man, he would be his own master, he would become a proficient in what the devil calls God's prerogative, *knowing good and evil?*

It is true—too true. Nothing like sin for making strides in this knowledge! Nothing so effectual as to do the thing, if you would know what the thing is. Never will you so understand the good as when you can compare it by experience with the evil. No sense of the blessing of a home ever equalled that which the prodigal son acquired by going abroad—when he had spent his all, and there arose a mighty famine—when he would fain have shared their husks with the swine, and bethought himself of the hired servants at home, who had bread enough and to spare, while he, their young master, is perishing with hunger. Yes, indeed, the words were true; the first sinner, and every later sinner, has found them so. Sin does make men wise—wise to see themselves naked, wise to find it an evil thing and bitter for a man to have broken loose from his God.

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*Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant—*

*But he knoweth not that the dead are there, and that her guests are in the depths of hell!*

(4) Time forbids me to carry further the instructive parallel between the first sin and all sin. How at this point, the very turning-point between the suggestion and the action, every barrier is swept away, the soul can think of nothing but the pleasantness of sinning—*good for food, pleasant to the eyes, desirable to make one wise*. Yes, there can be no doubt that the thing must be done. The devil is right, and God is wrong. God is hard and unreasonable, perhaps scarcely serious, in the forbidding. I will sin if I die for it: I will sin—the story advances—and I will make to sin. Others shall share alike the present joy and the aftertaste of misery. *She took of the fruit, and did eat; and she gave also unto another with her, and he did eat!* Unbelief first, then disobedience; then corruption, then self-excusing; then the curse and the expulsion—turn the page, and you shall find a murder!

3. That original sin of which we have spoken first as the first sin, and secondly as the speci-

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men sin, is, in the third and last place, this also—the infectious sin.

We are prepared by our last words to find it so. We have seen how it immediately corrupted—how it instantly gave to another, and drew him in to share the deed and its consequences—how the very next record of Scripture, startling in its suddenness, is that of the murder of a man by his brother. All this prepares us, in some degree, for that doctrine which the New Testament certainly draws from the history; that there is a taint or corruption in the race by reason of the Fall; that it is not only a *following of Adam*, by the deliberate independent choice of each one of us, which is the true account of our sinning; but this rather—an influence and infection of evil, derived and inherited by us all from that ancestry of the transgressor.

Neither the Bible nor the Church gives any encouragement to that strange invention of theology which would hold us responsible, at the distance of six millenniums, for the act of Adam in eating the forbidden fruit. Not for this does God account us guilty. *The soul that sinneth,*

*it shall die. The son shall not die for the iniquity of the father*—much less, then, for the misdeed of one separated from him by two hundred generations.

But there is a sense in which St. Paul's words, *By the offence of one many—the many*, mankind at large—*were made sinners*, may be read for humiliation and profit by all of us. God does look upon communities, upon Churches and countries, where we can see only the individual. There are national sins, there are national judgments, though we generally misread them, and are seldom safe when we quit the limits of the personal being. If God, with whom but one thing is impossible—to create a God—to create a moral being possessed of any one of His attributes, even if it be but the incapability of falling—was pleased to put the race to the test in the individual, and so to *shut up all at once in sin, that He might have mercy upon all*—if some mystery of this kind lurk in the Fall, I say not that it is absolutely inconceivable, though I dare not preach it as revelation.

This we can see—and it is an approach, though timid and distant, to the revelation of



an original sin—that there could not but be an influence, real and strong, exercised upon the Adam race by the Adam transgression. You have all recognized, in painful experience, the effect upon a family, of the misdoing of its head: you have all witnessed, I doubt not, instances in which, to the third and fourth generation of his offspring, sin has found out the sinner—how want and disease, how squalor and misery, how neglect and ignorance, how sin too and crime, have stamped themselves as household features upon some town or village home, traceable positively, traceable visibly, to the fault of one man, under the blighting shade of whose ineffaceable memory children and children's children have grown to manhood and sunk to the grave. It would be scarcely a figure of speech if we spoke, in such cases, of a taint and infection of evil, running in the blood, damaging the physical, the moral, the spiritual life. Something of this kind the calmest reflection may attribute to the first sin. Not one man of all this mighty progeny has drawn his first breath or his latest in an atmosphere pure and salubrious. Before and behind him, around and above, there has been the

heritage of weakness, the presence and pressure of an influence in large part evil. No man has ever been able to cut off this entail: he takes life itself with this clog and drawback. The original sin is not exemplary only, it is infectious too. Fallen sons of a fallen forefather, God must send down His hand from above, if we are to be rescued, ever, out of these deep, these turbid waters.

Blessed be God, He has vouchsafed to do this, in His Son Jesus Christ, and by His Holy Spirit! Brothers, all, in the corrupt image of the earthly, let us be all brothers also, true and loving, in the divine image of the heavenly. Let us accept our condition, as this revelation of God describes it. No progress will be made in the science of Redemption, till we are first rooted and grounded in the wholesome discipline of the Fall. We marvel and repine at our low estate; we struggle and kick against the driving goad of evil; we perplex ourselves with the mystery of our weakness; we give up ourselves for lost because we find ourselves that which God says we are—unable of ourselves to think or to do one good thing—sinful sons of sinful men, impotent

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to right, strong only in evil. The revelation of the Fall asserts, if it explains not, this mystery. God knows what we are—and this, nothing else, is it. O blessed knowledge! God sees us fallen, and, as fallen, deals with us; asks not of us that which the fallen cannot—asks not of us a strength, asks not of us a wisdom, asks not of us a holiness, which we have not; asks this only, that we put our hand into the hand which He stretches to us from on high—that we accept the love which loves first and loves freely—that we cry out to Him for the bread and the water—the bread of life, the water of grace. *Such trust have we*—a trust befitting the fallen—in the Cross and in the Spirit of Christ: on it we lean—through it only, in God's time, shall we be perfected. *With Thee is the fountain of life: and in Thy light alone shall we see light.*

v.

YE ARE DEAD.\*

Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.—Cor.  
iii. 3.

**Y**E *are dead.* A strange address this, for an audience of mortal yet living men! In what book but the Bible would not such language startle us into attention?

God grant that the words of the text—drawn from our Easter Service—may fall upon your ears, beloved brethren, on this great crowning festival of our Gospel, with something of the reality, the power, the vividness, with which they were first uttered to the amanuensis in that Roman lodging by the manacled handcuffed writer, and heard in Philemon's house, from Archippus's lips, by that old long-buried Colossian congregation, which met there on the first day of the week

\* Easter Day, 1870.

(as we meet in ten thousand Churches in this nineteenth century) to hear the Word, to pray the prayer, to break the bread !

In some respects the words, *Ye are dead*, may seem ill chosen for the Festival of Resurrection. Everything to-day tells of life—nature and grace conspiring together—this loveliest of spring (almost of summer) mornings—this blessed Easter Day, with its *Christ raised from the dead to die no more*: and yet I address you in these words of solemn, if not melancholy pathos—*Ye are dead*.

But was St. Paul dead, think you—was St. Paul drooping and inanimate—when he bade his writer put down the saying before us? Was no life stirring in that mighty capital, greater in importance than Paris or London, the centre of a world's activities, when St. Paul wrote, *Ye, we, are dead*? Was there no clang of arms, no mustering and reviewing of troops, in that vast Prætorian camp which coerced Italy, which fed the legions of Rhine and Danube? Were there no rival parties, no court factions, no rise and fall of ministries, on that Palatine, in that Palace, which has given a name to the focus, in

all lands and ages, of state pageants and state intrigues? Were there at that particular period no exciting crimes, no horrible assassinations, no deadly feuds between royal sons and mothers, such as stirred into agony the news of the day and furnished materials for everlasting history? Or do you forget that the man who writes, *Ye are dead*—and evidently regards that as the universal truth, the daily experience, of himself and all Christians—was a man alive with the interest of all life—an ecclesiastic who had the world for his diocese, and was in correspondence, as to every detail of doctrine and practice, with two (if not three) continents? Or, once again, was there any community of that stirring age more vividly alive in its religious controversies and metaphysical speculations, than that Colossian Church, standing halfway between the old orgies of Phrygian enthusiasm and the nascent vagaries of Alexandrian Gnosticism—needing equally the warning against ritualism and rationalism—against intrusion into mysteries forbidden, and going back for perfection to a carnalism renounced in the beginning?

It was amidst excitements like these, it was

to men twice alive, that one of the most vigorous thinkers, one of the keenest controversialists, one of the most human men that ever existed, in keenness of observation and sympathy of heart, wrote these words, and threw them broadcast over all lands and times, as the characteristic of the Christian life in all its phases and developements—

*Ye are dead, and your life is hidden.*

Let us, my brethren, in all earnestness and seriousness of thoughts, endeavour and pray to learn something this morning from this remarkable utterance. Fear not, any one—fear not from the humble interpreter—fear not from the inspired writer—fear not from the originating inspiring Spirit—that there lurks in this text one weak, one feeble, one morbid or fantastic idea! Depend upon it, that in this saying, as in each saying, rightly interpreted, of Holy Scripture, there is nothing but strength and intelligence and elevation for all whose ear is opened of God to drink in the wisdom and the grace offered! If we feel it not, it is not because we are too sensible, too practical, too philosophical—it is because we are too earthly, too grovelling, too mean and vile.

1. First, then, the text says plainly this to us : There is a life, not beyond only—that we all admit—but within and above this life.

The world deals with Revelation on a principle of eclecticism. It is pleasant to be assured that, the game of life successfully played out, there is a blessed immortality, not clearly defined, but absolutely certain for all but criminals and convicts, in store for a weary frame and an outworn intellect. There shall each deepest interest of this life be renewed (they hope) in luxurious memory—there shall each domestic joy, each delicious affection, live again in perfected, because eternalized, fruition—there shall every painful effort, whether moral or intellectual, be superseded for ever in a delightful facility, an absolute spontaneity, of being and knowing—there, in short, shall everything survive which was pleasant below, and everything be left behind us which was either irksome in the doing or laborious in the acquiring.

The world will both keep itself and have another. The beauty of religion, in the eyes of the world, is, that it offers everything and demands nothing. While you are in prosperity,



enjoy—enjoy twice over—because adversity will bring with it its own recompense, its own consolation. Live wholly in and for the present, and expect securely on your deathbed the clerical comfort and the sacramental viaticum.

I scarcely exaggerate, I do not consciously misrepresent, the worldly notion of the place and the work of Christianity and the Gospel. It must be kept distinct from the thoughts and the pleasures of time. It has its place, it has its office; but that place is not here, that office is not yet. Christ came to bring immortality to light; so, when the mortal drops off, we shall just say—and of course we shall be answered—*Lord, Lord, open to us!*

The man who studies the Bible, the man who communes with himself, the man who knows what he wants, and refuses to gamble with truth, is aware that a revelation of this kind would be at least as unsatisfactory to man as derogatory to God. What we want is the eternal *now*. What makes this life so poor and dry and barren is its insubstantiality, its vacuity, its vanity. We have everything, and we are beggars. Not a breath of the East wind blows

upon us, and yet we are parched and arid and withered. We have all, and have nothing. We bring home a lapful of treasure, only *to put it into a bag with holes*. We hew out for ourselves cistern after cistern, and cistern after cistern holds no water.

The Bible is the minister to this emptiness. At first sight you may imagine it to say only, There is a life after death ; a life endless in duration, perfect in satisfaction. When you look more closely, you see that the real promise is an eternal life to be entered upon now. The man who waits till death for it will have missed it. The man who will live for ever—in that sense in which alone living is life—must begin to live now. Life is not extension, it is satisfaction, of being. Merely to live for ever might be a curse ; the question is still behind, What, and how ? What manner of life, and how to live it ?

St. Paul answers, Christ answers, To live indeed is to have God in you. To live indeed is to be a consciously forgiven and a consciously renewed man ; to have peace with God, and to have strength from God ; to know in whom you have believed, and to be able to do all things

through Christ strengthening you. The life beyond this life must be first a life within and a life above.

2. Now there are few persons—none, I trust, in this Congregation—who do not admit the possibility of such a life. Records of conversions, biographies of Christians, lives of saints, Acts of the Apostles, carry a testimony which the world of sense and intelligence cannot, does not profess to set altogether aside. Separated, the two extremes, by all the space which intervenes between contempt and envy, there is at the bottom of most hearts a belief in the possibility of grace; in other words, in the existence of a piety and communion with God, not only powerful in the idea but true in the fact. The outward life, of business and society, of politics and literature, goes on its way, for the most part, regardless; the chariot wheels are seldom stopped to contemplate or examine: still, as a matter of fact, it is known, like other phenomena of nature and mind, that there is such a thing as vital godliness—call it excitement, call it mysticism, call it Methodism, or what you will—you can scarcely call it, always and everywhere, pre-

tence or hypocrisy ; certainly it produces results ; certainly it has given an immense impulse to philanthropy, to charity ; now and then it crosses your path as a help or a hindrance, a power which may be used, or an impediment which must be got rid of. It is there : the life within is : Christ found it, or Christ created it, which you will ; but unquestionably Christ's disciples have it ; and they ascribe it to an inward working, of which, at all events, without trying it, you must be an incompetent judge.

Not only is the fact of an inward life admitted—but in a vast multitude of cases there is a hope, an intention, more or less strong, of possessing it before we die. Common sense tells us that, if heaven is God's presence—if the life after death is not exactly this life repeated—if there shall be there neither politics nor polemics, neither crime nor scandal, neither news nor novels, but only such things as interest men of thought and soul, of love divine and human, of pure heart and clean hands—it cannot be entered upon without training, without discipline, without effort and foretaste too ; and that thus immortality itself, rightly understood, con-

tains in it the other thought, union with God now. A man who would live after death must live before death in the same sense of living.

Thus the importance of the inward life is seen to lie not only in its everlastingness—no mean characteristic—let no man affect to despise it—but in this rather, that it is essentially a truer, a more real life, than the outward. We think perhaps that nothing can be so substantial, so unquestionable as to its reality, as this routine of business which gives us wealth, or this fierce antagonism of parties which decides the action of an empire. A vast stride would be made in the direction of vital godliness, if we could only be taught rightly to appreciate the comparative value of the two lives—the outward life and the inward. I know that it is difficult, next to impossible, to maintain this superhuman, this divine estimate of the seen and the unseen. Yet we have no difficulty in asserting it concerning times past. Go back to an age in which Nero was ruling Rome, and Paul a prisoner in the barracks—you do not doubt which of those two men was really instinct with a more vital vitality: it is not only

that the one was a fratricide and a matricide, and the other an innocent conscientious sufferer for duty ; it is something far beyond this that we feel when we contrast the permanent influence, the net result, of those two lives—the one rescued from oblivion only by infamy, the other conquering still, and to conquer, wherever hearts feel or minds reason. The one was a thing of the present, and just went his way with the generation : the other was a man indestructible because God was in him : his immortality in heaven has its reflection, has its echo, has its pulsation, through every age and every language of earth.

3. Thus we learn to invert our estimate of things insignificant and all-important. The truest life is always the hidden. Even in regard to this world it is so. Principle, which you cannot see, is essentially higher than action, which you can. The man of ideas is a statesman of higher order than the adroit administrator. The man who has formed and adhered to a purpose is a nobler politician than the man who prides himself upon never having changed a detail. Thus far in things still of the earth.

How far above, then, on the same principle, must he stand, whose very principles and purposes have a hidden spring within them! If there be a fire of devotion, if there be a zeal of love, which moves the motive, how magnificent must be the life thus lived! Instead of undervaluing the invisible in comparison with the seen, we shall begin to regard that life as the highest in which *all* is out of sight, and that as incomparably the poorest of which you can count the gains and handle the perquisites.

4. There is a further thought still. It is the world's talk that a religious man is a visionary—at all events, is eccentric and unaccountable—to use the common phrase, you never know where to find or when you have him. He is liable to a thousand gusts of doubt and scruple, which blow him out of *the direct forthright* of action, and make him a doubtful gain to the cause which he advocates. His conscience is so fearful of wrong that it is impotent for right. He balances argument against argument, ends in the opposite of his beginning, and even his speech gives no index to his vote. This comes, the world says, of being *righteous overmuch*.

The hidden life is in the clouds; he whose citizenship is in heaven is out of his element on the earth. We do not so read the Gospel, nor the experience of human life. It is, of course, possible that a man of puzzled mind and blundering action may be a believer; and that his belief may not change him, may leave him to the end puzzled and blundering. But the fault of this lies not with his faith. *Post hoc* is not *propter hoc* even here. Far more often the Gospel, deeply felt and thoroughly walked by, has made the crooked straight, and the dull lively, even in matters not religious.

In proportion as the inner life is vivid, the outer life will be effective. St. Paul was naturally a man of vigour. His very faults were those of energy. When he *apprehended*, or rather *was apprehended by*, Christ, he did not lose vigour; he became more intense, more earnest, more executive, than ever. The inward life does not distract, it concentrates—does not enervate, it emphasizes—the outward. While it calms, it stirs; while it gives repose, it also gives force.

You have seen the invigorating influence of a



human passion. You have observed how love will make a timid woman courageous ; how it gives rush and flow to a desultory purposeless man, to have within himself the consciousness of a virtuous affection, for the sake of which it is worth while to be brave and necessary to be pure. You have said sometimes, of one and another among your friends, " I can scarcely recognize in him the same man "—and you have found the explanation afterwards in some secret kindling on the altar of his soul of a fire of human devotion. So is it in that one higher region still—that hidden life, that death to the world, of which St. Paul tells. If you wish to move hearts, if you wish to influence minds—if you wish to be a statesman where before you have been a politician, an orator where before you were a rhetorician—if you wish to warm where before you shone, to kindle where before you dazzled—learn to live the life unseen, to come forth from God's presence into the communion and contact of men. *The life hidden with Christ in God* will show itself in an elevation, a dignity, a nobleness of spirit, due to a presence inwardly felt, and manifested without

pretence or parade in the words and in the actions of the possessor. *They were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake. They that sate in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an Angel.*

5. Need it be said, my brethren, that this life of which such glorious things are spoken comes not naturally to any man? Thousands idly hear of it, dream of it, sigh for it, for one who sets himself to seek, to cherish, to confess it. Beware of that languid indolent assent, which relegates the attainment into some distant region, of past or future, with which the present, our only possession, has neither contact nor commerce. If there be one word of truth in that which has now been spoken, it concerns us to act upon it. Let no one say that the mystery of the hidden life has been proposed to you to-day as a figment of doctrine, as a theory of theology, as one of those *counsels of perfection* which are altogether supererogatory to the necessities of this being. If there be such a thing as the hidden life, then are we dead men without it—dead, not like St. Paul, to this life

of time, but dead to that only life which is indeed eternal.

This grace must be aspired to. There is in the affairs of earth a vast power in ambition. A man determines he will be this or that, and the resolution half gives it him. Let the object be well chosen—chosen, that is, with due regard to the man and his powers—and the choice is half the battle. Obstacles, impediments, mountains of difficulty vanish before him, and ambition, seconded by perseverance, has not rested till it is attained.

There is a Christian ambition, brethren, as well as a worldly. The Bible is given in large part to inspire, to fire us with, this grace. It lifts partially the veil which lies upon character, and discloses to us a *secret of God* which is *with them that fear Him*. Its promises are large and free. *If any man thirst, let him come and drink—If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father*. Through that door which is Christ, whosoever will may enter. Inside that door is the life we speak of: the man may go in and out—enter to commune, go out to do—enter to gain strength, go out to do

all things through the strengthening—and he will be, at once, whatever his calling, *a minister and a witness*. New powers, new tastes, new affections will spring up unbidden. The daily reference of all things to a Friend whom he loves, to a Master whom he serves, shall give a new firmness, a new alacrity to his step. Little things are now great, irksome things pleasant, in the transforming light of a glorious interest and a divine presence. The old is passed away, all becomes new. He fears now no evil tidings; he measures not now by earth's rule; he knows now that there is a greater battle raging than between rival parties, that a mightier kingdom is at stake than even the loved commonwealth of England; his heart stands fast, however earnest his gaze, however intense his toil, because he knows that, *be the earth never so unquiet, God sits above the water-flood, and God remains a King for ever*.

Into this new state—into this life, so real at once, and so mysterious—Jesus Christ invites, calls, beckons us to-day. Whatever our past history, whatever our present condition—however many be our sins, our fears, our infirmities

—the gate is open. *Come unto me* is the inscription without—*Sin no more* the watchword within: rest of heart and soul, peace amidst trouble, strength in weakness, life in death, shall be yours on the instant: safety still, eternal life still, when flesh and heart fail you: a course like that of the light which *goes on and illuminates unto a perfect day*: at last, that *rest which remaineth* and is no more broken—a home where Christ is, and, with Him, *quietness and assurance for ever*.

## VI.

### THE ARGUMENT FROM DIFFICULTY.\*

And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away : for it was very great.—MARK xvi. 4.

THE difficulty is the reason. The stone is rolled away—because it is very great.

Volumes of comfort are hidden in the words. Man's troubles and God's mercies are here tied together in a marvellous manner: let the combination be our text, our thought, this morning.

The little word *for* is one of the puzzles of Scripture. Often it seems to link together, as cause and effect, two very incongruous facts: as in the famous passage—*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do*. Careless readers often pass it over: inaccurate scholars, always bad interpreters, say, in this place and that, that *for* must mean,

\* April 24. 1870.

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and therefore shall mean, *though* or *yet* : others, more conscientious construers, will invent some long parenthesis, and make the *for* explain some verse far in the background—as indeed here in some Editions you will find the first part of the 4th verse enclosed within brackets, and *for it was very great* coupled, by this stratagem, not to the relief, but to the anxiety—not to *the stone was rolled away*, but to the question, *Who shall do it for us?*

My brethren, it is often the first view which is the true one—and I think it is so here. God's word is the echo or the mirror of God's dealing : I trust you have all found it to be the case in life—and, if so, you will not stumble over the same thing when you find it in the Bible—that it is where man's resource fails, that God's help comes in ; that, as man's extremity is (proverbially) God's opportunity, so difficulty is an argument, not against, but for, God's intervention, and the very greatness of the stone becomes, in Scripture and in experience, a reason why it is rolled away.

As there is an argument from want, so there is an argument from difficulty.

Both the one and the other proceed, it is true, upon a postulate. That there is a God living, willing, really acting; and that He is a God not cruel but merciful, and not indifferent but observant. I make no other assumption than this—and then I say, that, just as, *Lord, to whom else shall we go?* is a sound reason for going to Christ, namely, because we want Him, so that the stone (I care not what stone) is very great, is a sound reason for expecting it to be supernaturally rolled away.

If a thing is good for me, and I cannot get it, I expect that God will give it me. If a thing is bad for me, and I cannot avert it, I expect on that very account, that God, if I look to Him, will. You will say, we have gone back to the school-room—to the nursery—for simplicities, for truisms, like these. We could not go to a better place for God's teaching, than to one of those elementary, those indeed primary schools, in which—

Our souls have sight of that immortal sea  
Which brought us hither; . . .  
Can see the children sport upon the shore,  
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.

There are two great provinces of difficulty,



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and in each the argument holds—the faith, and the life.

1. It happens to most men, sooner or later, to be brought face to face with some of those questions which are vital to the Gospel. It may be for yourself: you yourself doubt. It may be for another: a friend doubts, and either would communicate his doubting to you, or else comes to you to relieve it. Thus, in these days—and I know not that it was ever otherwise—certainly it was thus in the first days—a man must expect, must lay his account for, difficulties in the way of his faith; and if he is to hold his own, he must be able to answer questions concerning the hope that is in him.

There is an infection of doubting. One doubter makes many; and, in the same mind, one doubt generates more. So that the man who has begun by giving up some subordinate, some almost insignificant outwork of Christianity, often finds himself driven backward, backward, backward still, from doctrine to doctrine, from revelation to revelation, yes, from fact to fact, till the demon of doubt assails the very citadel of the Divinity or the Resurrection

of Christ Himself; and he who thought it a small matter to part with a few books of the Old Testament or a few articles of the Church Catholic, is startled to perceive himself an infidel in all but the name—without an Atonement, without a Saviour, and practically alone without even God in the world.

This disastrous result may be due to different influences. It may be due to a thoroughly careless, trifling spirit—to a reckless vanity of discovering objections—to a deep-rooted dislike of religion—to an inveterate habit and at last love of sinning. Each one of these evil influences has its victims: perhaps this one congregation may, in the sight of God, present specimens of each.

But the subject now proposed to us is that of difficulties—their use and abuse.

It is idle to deny that there are difficulties in believing. When we approach the grave of Jesus, to do honour to the sacred corpse, there lies a huge stone at the door, and we ask among ourselves, Who shall roll it away? It is a parable for all time. Only shallow minds, uneducated or unreflecting, can be insensible to the

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difficulties which beset the faith. Wiser men acknowledge, feel, ponder, grapple with them. Christ Himself made no secret of them. He felt tenderly for one who could not believe without seeing. He recognized the superior blessedness of those who could. He spoke of the distinctive truths of His Gospel as demanding acceptance, not on argument, but on authority. He brought them from heaven, and the proof of His mission is the proof of His doctrine. Believe in Christ, and so believe in Christianity. So difficult to the natural reason are the revelations of the Gospel, that they require, He said, not only a conviction of His right to teach, but also a personal communication, within the soul, of the thing taught. The recognition of difficulty is the first step towards faith.

No difficulty can be greater than that cardinal fact which this season commemorates—the resurrection of Christ. St. Paul places it side by side, in this respect, with one other revelation—the work of grace in the soul. Of both alike he can but pray that they may be apprehended. *The eyes of your understanding being enlightened that ye may know . . .*

*what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to—on the scale of—that working of His mighty power which He wrought in Christ when he raised Him from the dead.* It is entirely beside the mark of truth to represent these things as intelligible in the sense of comprehensible. We must leave something—something real—for God to do, and something also—something new—for Christ to reveal. Let the difficulty press upon us—the question, Who shall roll us away the stone? To ignore the difficulty is at once to aggravate its strength, and to repudiate its discipline.

Thus much none, I suppose, will deny, that difficulties are to be expected in a Divine Revelation. The God of Providence is evidently *a God who hideth Himself*. The God of our life—if there be a God—has clouds and darkness round about Him. What event, what circumstance, what providence, has not in it many things indeed mysterious—mysterious in the truest and darkest of senses, because they leave justice and righteousness often unvindicated, and confound in one present sentence alike the good and the evil? If then the God

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of our life be also the God of our Gospel, can we expect that all should be light in the one, when confessedly so much is dark in the other?

But now, if this be at all true in general, must it not have its exemplification in particulars? Shall we cry out against this item and that in Christ's Gospel as transcending reason, when we admit that God's ways, on the whole, are not our ways, and that, if they were, revelation itself would be superfluous?

The course recommended by the text is quite opposite to this. The text bids us acknowledge that the mighty massive stone is there, and ponder anxiously the question, Who shall remove it? The text bids us take full and accurate account of everything in the Gospel, of everything in the Bible, which contradicts our expectation or makes trial of our faith. The text bids us to record and register the difficulty, to take note of it, and desire its explanation. Having done this, let us call God in. Let us ask Him whose word the Gospel calls itself, to make this message consistent with His other messages—with His message of the natural reason, the providential experience, and the

judicial conscience. Let us ask Him not to suffer us, in haste or impatience, to give up that access to a Saviour crucified and risen, which we feel to be essential to our happiness and to our hope. Whatever the impediments to Christian faith or Christian comfort, let us tarry, in humble patience, if it be but at the closed door of the sepulchre, till it shall please Him to make the crooked straight before us, and the rough places plain.

So waiting, my brethren, in earnest persevering prayer, be we well assured that ours shall at last be the experience vouchsafed to tens of thousands before us—we may not see the stone go, but we shall find it gone: doctrines which once seemed incredible shall, as years advance, become our stay and our rest: the soul, refreshed and invigorated by the risen life of Jesus, shall come to accept His resurrection not as a difficult dogma, but as the necessary, the blessed harmonizer of the two facts, His death on earth and His life in heaven—shall begin almost to say, If God had not told, I should have inferred it—inasmuch as I read in the Gospels the simple narrative of the life and death of Jesus, and I

feel in myself the equally resistless evidence of His Omnipotent, His Divine life in heaven. *When they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away—for it was very great.* It was worthy of God's intervention, in behalf of the soul that waited for Him, not though, but because, the impediment was immense.

And, O my brethren, while you are waiting for the stone to go, cease not to worship. Even doubt is not reason enough for not worshipping. Not to worship is to cease to doubt: it is, to have decided for unbelief. Even of the disciples who met the risen Saviour in Galilee, *some doubted*—but all worshipped. If doubt be not yet denial, if suspense be not yet apostasy, if there be yet three parts in you faith and two unbelief, that preponderance is enough to act upon—as much as we have to act upon in ten thousand matters of every-day life: your present duty, because your present reason and conscience, is to worship: say, if you must, Who shall roll away the stone? but draw nigh, as you speak, to the sepulchre where slept the living! So approaching, when you look, you shall perhaps see the stone gone!

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2. That which is true of the faith is true also of the life. Difficulty is a reason for the interposition of the Omnipotent.

How bright a light is thus thrown upon some of the darkest spots of human being !

There is a wish in your heart—not sinful—there is no promise for sinful, lawless lustings—a wish, not sinful, but strong. You desire this or that calling—another is imposed upon you. Earthly friends, worldly interests, summon you to a lucrative business, an ambitious profession : Christ has beckoned to you from heaven, and you desire to give up all for Him. You see not how it is to be accomplished. Expectations, wishes, entreaties, commands, of parents or friends, impel you in one direction—is it right, is it possible, to disregard them ? Christ Himself seems to answer, No. Christ Himself says, *Whereinsoever thou art called, therein abide.* How can you serve Him in spite of Him ? How can you doubt that the wish put into your heart was put there as a trial, not as a direction ? Wait awhile—wait, and pray : again and again Christ has made a path, unexpected, half unwelcome when it came, now through change, now through adversity, now



through death itself, towards the realization : a year, a month, ago, you said within yourself, The stone is there, fixed, immovable ; you look to-day, and it is gone—gone, not though, but because, it was great, and therefore God has removed it.

There is in your heart some strong, some virtuous yet hopeless affection. Everything forbids it—prejudice, prohibition, hostility of friends ; separation, utter and final, is the sentence to-day, the blighting sentence, upon the honest passion of your life. Wait a while, wait and pray ; you see not the stone move, but you look up and it is gone. God has given you your heart's desire—receive it from Him and He will add His blessing !

Sometimes the text fulfils itself in a very different way. Your mind was fully bent upon a particular calling : it might be the ministry itself of Christ's Church ; the ministry, we will say for example, of this Reformed and Apostolical branch of Christ's Church in England. With the fullest consent of friends, with the liveliest approval of conscience, you had devoted and dedicated yourself, from your youth up, to

this sacred work. Just when you were ripe for it, Ordination full in view, a scruple came in. There was one of the Thirty-nine Articles, there was an expression in the Baptismal Office, there was a clause in the Athanasian Creed, which struck you with alarm—you could not sign, you could not say, you could not assent to it: conscience is a sacred voice, and in good men imperious: there is nothing to be done: *whatsoever is not of faith is sin*: you cannot vow the great vow *with a lie in your right hand*: there is nothing for it—you must wait, you must postpone, you must give up your heart's choice, your life's work. How often has God stepped in when man was saying, *Who shall roll away the stone?* How often has prolonged thought, seconded and hallowed by complete self-surrender, ended in the absolute sweeping away of the supposed impossibility! How often has enquiry, counsel, prayer, so soon as the dread of a guilty self-interest was precluded by an entire heart's submission, resulted in a calm, sober, conscientious approval of the suspected formula of faith or worship, and the candidate been able to present himself for his holy commission with

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a perfect tranquillity of thought and feeling ! May we not apply to such cases the blessed comfort of the text, The stone of difficulty was gone—why ? because it had been great, and therefore God rolled it away out of the path of His waiting servant !

Sometimes the exemplification has been in the region, not of scruple, but of temptation. How often have we vexed and lacerated ourselves in the prospect of some terrible snare, inevitable, as it seemed, and resistless ! A friend, dear as our own soul, would ask us to do this or that which we ought not ; would bid us accompany him to this or that amusement or dissipation of which we doubted, or scarcely doubted, the lawfulness ; would laugh us into compliance, or threaten us with the loss of a friendship precious as life. We see no way of escape. Ours is not that hardy robust nature which likes or tolerates isolation ; we cling and follow and love—it is death to us to be cast off or let alone. Who shall roll out of our way this rock of difficulty ? we ask, and ask again ; we look this way and that way—we dread, yet desire, and dread again, the hour of meeting—behold, when

it comes, comes after a severance of months or years, our friend is of one mind with us as to right and wrong—God has wrought with him also, not with us only : or else God blesses the the first faint half-hinted doubt from our lips, to his conviction and turning. When we look again, the stone is gone—rolled away, not though (we must think), but because, it was great, and because God, the Almighty and the All-merciful, saw and compassionated our weakness !

But indeed, my brethren, it is not only in the great events or transitions of a life that the text fulfils itself : it has its example in the commonest every-day experiences alike of work and of worship.

This Congregation thinks it a very easy thing for its Minister to ascend this Pulpit, and speak a few commonplace words upon that most commonplace thing—Religion. Little do they know the trial of nerve and the toil of heart which goes to the making of the very poorest Sermon. If they did, they would criticize less, and they would sympathize more. They would know that indeed there is nothing, for one

charged with such an office, but to throw himself absolutely upon the help of God, advance towards the thwarting obstacle, and look to Him, Him alone, for the thought and the feeling, for the insight and the expression, for the earnestness and the persuasion—nay, for smaller things too—for the eyesight, and the voice, and the reason, and the very life itself, in virtue of which alone the work can physically as well as spiritually be done!

But I need not speak of the Minister—what is that thing which you are here to do? The man can never have prayed, who knows of no difficulty in prayer. What! shall I, here on earth, cribbed and cabined in a frame of flesh and blood, hope that my weak voice, that my puny thought, that my insignificant want, shall find its way, up the great sky, into the ear of Him who has the charge of two universes? Who shall roll away this stone—the stone of distance and incommensurableness between the Creator and the thing made? O, there is nothing for it but the encouragement provided in the text—they walked towards the impossible rock, and when they came, lo, it was gone.

Why? Because it was great, and God, the Omnipotent, had taken care that it should be rolled away. He would have us pray—and, therefore, in the attempt, is given the power; and *to Him that heareth the prayer—to Him shall all flesh come.*

There is another example—we will add but this one—of the saying before us, and it is at once the latest and the most momentous. You may have known some Christian person, exemplary in life, devout, devoted in soul, who trembled, nevertheless, in the foreview of death. This life is precious to many, very precious, who seem to have but scant joy of it: it is a pleasant thing to the eyes, says the wise man, so much as to behold the sun; and surely this world is more than a beautiful picture—it is very full of joys, mingled indeed but not poisoned, for millions of God's creatures: nature bids us cherish life, and grace itself, speaking by an Apostle's lips, tells of Divine mercy shown in bringing back a saintly man from the gate of death into the chequered life of the living. Besides all this, there is, for all but a few, some clinging lingering gloom around the grave which Jesus

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opened : few have so clear, so sober a certainty of waking bliss in the prospect of a life beyond, as to take away all the fear and all the shrinking which testifies against death as the penalty and curse of sin. The fact, at all events, is so. Many true Christians have felt all their lifetime a dread, if not of death, then of dying. Can you not bear witness, some of you, how, in their case, when the end came, the fulfilment of the text came with it? how, when they were asking, *Who shall roll us away the stone?* a form, not of angel mould, but like unto the Son of Man, came and swept it from before them, saying, *I am the Resurrection and the Life, and he who believeth in me shall live though he die?* Has not their latest breath borne witness to the annihilation of fear through Him who by dying overcame death, and rising again opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers? *When they looked, close to it, the stone was rolled away—because it was great, and because God, their God, vouchsafed to do it.*

Courage, then, followers, seekers of the Crucified! This is your heritage, this the God you serve! so mighty, so tender, so sympa-

thizing with your sorrows, so strong to save!  
Shrink not from pain; swerve not from duty.  
He is with you: and greater is He alone than  
world, flesh, and devil united! When you  
ponder with yourselves the anxious question,  
in some critical moment, of life or death, *Who  
shall remove the stone?* look once again and you  
shall find it gone—gone, not by human might  
nor human skill, but gone because it is great,  
and because weak in yourselves, you shall ever  
be more than conquerors through Him who  
loves you!



## VII.

### THE ASCENSION.\*

And a cloud received Him out of their sight.—ACTS i. 9.

I. **T**HE Ascension is a *fact*. While they beheld, He was taken up. It was not merely that He ceased to visit, and the disciples inferred Ascension from absence. Christ predicted it: thus and not otherwise would He depart. They should see the Son of Man ascend up where He was before. It should not be doubtful where He was. The Church was not to gather itself week by week, in upper chamber or ampler synagogue, with the idea that on any particular occasion, the doors being shut, Jesus might show Himself in the midst of them. He who had been seen risen must be seen to ascend.

The Ascension, after Resurrection, was pro-

\* May 29, 1870.

bable. The resurrection-body is no denizen of earth. The Son of God, declared by resurrection, has his natural home in heaven. Wonder was exhausted at Easter : the Ascension, glorious and magnificent, was scarcely a surprise. St. Luke is its Evangelist. St. Matthew is silent. St. Mark's Gospel, according to the opinion of many, ended originally without it. St. John, though he twice records predictions of it by name, and many times by implication, does not describe or even record it in narrative. These Evangelists seem to have presupposed it : *of course* the risen Christ must ascend. They busied themselves in proof of Resurrection—they considered Ascension as involved, enwrappt, enveloped in it. St. Luke alone with the Ascension ends his *former treatise*, and with the Ascension begins his second. He makes it the natural limit of the Gospel : *All that Jesus began both to do and teach until the day in which He was taken up.* His account of it is full and graphic. We do not envy the man who can read it and doubt. Every line, every word, marks the eye-witness. The writer must have either seen it—or, since we know, from himself, that

he was a diligent investigator, a careful recorder, not an original witness, he must have heard it from one who had. The last conversation about the times and the seasons—the parting charge, to wait in Jerusalem—the renewed promise, of the power from on high—the very expression, *not many days hence*—the attitude and gesture of the departing Friend, who lifted up His hands to bless, and in that very act of benediction was parted from them—the words *while they beheld*—and, again, *while they looked steadfastly (gazed intently) into heaven as He went up*—above all, that most expressive clause, read as the text, *A cloud received Him out of their sight*—I know not what good evidence is, if this be not; I know not what history will keep its credit, if this must be set aside.

My brethren, we dread almost more its treatment by friends than its treatment by enemies. We expect that men who are sceptics as to the miracles, or the Divine Sonship, or the Atonement of Christ, will be sceptics, or more than sceptics, concerning the crowning fact of the Ascension. *It is not an open enemy that did magnify himself against me—it was thou, my*

*companion, my familiar friend, with whom I took sweet counsel, with whom we walked to the house of God as friends.* Beware, such men say to us, of laying too heavy a stress upon Gospel facts. Beware of straining too tightly the faith of the well-disposed. Especially in this particular century—so intelligent, so enquiring, so scientific. Be satisfied if you can make sure of the cardinal points. When we ask what these are, we are always taken back to the Sermon on the Mount—to the morality of the Gospel—of which, itself, a considerable part is called hyperbole, and the rest is accepted, not because it is revealed, but because it is rational; in short, because the “verifying faculty” in man accepts it, or the originating faculty in man had already discovered it. For the rest, enough, they say, if the *cloud* is left there—if the soul is warned against earthliness, if the aspirations of the man are elevated, in a spiritual sense, towards things above.

The Church, my brethren, one (in this respect) in all time, cannot acquiesce in this idealization of Gospel facts. She counts it not rational. *Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye?* I can understand what fact is, and I

can understand what thought is—an event to me is an event, and a doctrine, whether precept or warning, is to me a doctrine; but an *ideal fact* is neither this nor that—I can make nothing of it. Do you mean parable, allegory, mystery? or do you, in plain terms, mean invention, fable, falsehood?—let us know.

With us, the Ascension is a fact. Therefore, as such, we believe it. We keep its memory as we keep a birthday, as we commemorate a coronation. We should regard it differently if it were a fable with a moral. Probably we should not have a day for it. Probably we should enforce the thing signified, in Sermons rather, or Sacraments. If we did set apart a day for it, like Trinity Sunday, we should call it plainly, not Ascension Day, but Aspiration Day, or Heaven Day, or the like.

In all these difficult records of Holy Scripture—for a difficult conception it is—we must begin, my brethren, by settling in our own minds who Christ is—that He is not man only but God also—and thus all will be easy. Take one fact by itself, the Ascension, for example, and it is perplexing, it is incredible. But ascertain first

from His character, from His teaching, from His life, from His death, that Jesus Christ was not of earth though on it—that He was indeed man, very man, but that He was more, very God also—and then each thing, each miracle, each fact, becomes intelligible, becomes probable, at once—God *loosed for Him the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be holden of it*—God did by the might of His outstretched arm exalt Him, *and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places*, because His Son upon earth had glorified Him, and finished that work of Redemption which He gave Him to do. Then the Ascension becomes a fact—proved, like other facts, by evidence—but needing no extraordinary evidence above or beyond them.

And yet, my brethren, it has such evidence. Everything that the Church has done or suffered, through these eighteen centuries, is a direct evidence of the Ascension; an evidence diverse in kind as well as in degree from that which attests any fact whatever in history. St. Paul argues it thus. Taking himself as the example—*transferring the matter in a figure to himself*—he

says that he is *always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus—dying daily*, as he elsewhere says, under the buffetings of world and flesh and devil—that the life also of Jesus, His life now in heaven, might be made manifest in his body. Nothing can account for his preservation, for his consolation, for his zeal, for his courage, for his success, but the fact that Jesus lives, to strengthen him and to bless—in other words, that the crucified Saviour rose, and that the risen Saviour ascended. That there is any grace in any man, that there is one Church planted, or one life changed, or one soul quickened, is evidence, evidence enough, of the Ascension-life of Jesus. *Being by the right hand of God exalted, He hath shed forth this which ye see and hear.*

2. The Ascension is an *epoch*. It is a stopping-point and a starting-point in the march of time. When the cloud intercepted Jesus as He went up, it bore witness to a great change and a great transition. It for ever terminated the carnal, it finally established the spiritual, as the law of God's dealing.

Hitherto, amidst all the protests of conscience

and prophecy against resting in the visible, God had always had upon earth a visible presence. He had had *a place where He set His name*. It mattered not what, or where. Even the flaming sword which guarded Paradise Lost was a visible token of God's presence. The Patriarch's altar, built here, built there, as he journeyed along a land not his, was an allowed, if not prescribed, token to him of a manifested presence. When the tabernacle was reared, according to a pattern shown in detail, and in each bolt and partition significant—when its removal and its resting was the signal, day by day, of a nation's march and a nation's halt—when an elaborate ritual, prodigal of costly offering and even of animal life, was made the centre of Israel's life, domestic, social, political, ecclesiastical—when even *the Desire of all nations*, coming to mankind, came first and primarily to God's temple—then most of all was it seen that God laid stress upon the material, that He was still teaching by elements and rudiments, still making men learn that He is, before He goes on to teach the higher truth, that He is a Spirit, spiritually alone worshipped. Even the presence of Christ upon earth was the



presence of the carnal. The Word made flesh tabernacled amongst us in a body.

The Ascension was the turning-point. When Christ left the earth, as at this time, He finally and for ever exchanged the carnal for the spiritual. From that day place was nothing, form was nothing; the only temple of God is the soul, the only ritual of God's Church the offering of a free heart. Church-architecture, church-decoration, church-music, church-ministration, church-ordinance itself, is now only so far valuable as it helps—and it may even hinder—the worship of the devout soul rising to and communing with Him who is a Spirit.

We speak not in disparagement of a seemly and beautiful worship offered still in temples made with hands. Such worship has been in all ages the garment and the vehicle of the saints' communion with God. Upon united worship rests a special, an express benediction—and hearts deeply engaged, spirits warmed and invigorated by the sympathy and contact of other spirits, have in all ages borne testimony to the wisdom of the rule, to the fulfilment of the promise. Nevertheless, this experience is in

exact proportion to the spirituality of the devotion; and where the worship has not been offered on the faith of the Ascension, there God has seen nothing but an empty show, heard nothing but a babbling sound, offensive to Himself and not acceptable. The Ascension was an epoch in the Church's history—marking its final transition from the alphabet of form and matter, to the full age and mature capacity of a communion absolutely and altogether spiritual.

Thus the departure of Christ is never separated in Scripture from the arrival of the Comforter. If it is expedient that Christ should go, it is in order that the Spirit may come. That there should be yet a brief pause between Ascension and Pentecost, this is but because God would, as He ever loves to do, mark and emphasize the separate steps of His dispensations—like some master of speech or song, who never blurs or confounds syllable with syllable, or note with note, but gives to each one its just value, its articulate proportion of rhythm and force and melody. A three days' pause thus attested the death—when it might have sufficed that Christ should just die and instantly (on the very cross)

revive. A forty days' pause thus enforced the Resurrection—when human wisdom might have suffered Him to rise in full view of friends and foes, and instantly ascend to the heaven which He had won. In like manner there is a pause of ten days between the Ascension of Christ and the descent of the Spirit—enough to give emphasis to the want, and value to the compensation. But as Resurrection contained in it Ascension, so Ascension contained in it Pentecost. Ascension itself was the transition for the Church from a religion partly carnal to a religion altogether spiritual. He who descended then ascended, and He who ascended, ascended first to receive for man, and then to give to man, the Father's mighty promise, which is the Church's baptism with the fire, the comforting, cleansing, quickening fire, of the Holy Ghost. Thus Ascension is, secondly, not a fact only, but an epoch—a point of decisive transition from the carnal to the spiritual.

3. Thirdly, and finally, Ascension is a *doctrine* too. What is doctrine? Doctrine is a voice; it is one of God's facts speaking to us, speaking in us. Every real doctrine is the voice of a fact.

Ascension has its voice. It does not say to us, Here is an event to be enrolled in your chronologies; or, Here is a view to be contemplated in your meditations. It says this, Take me into your heart for comfort, and take me into your life for strength.

When a man's heart is crushed within him by the galling tyranny of sense; when, from the dawning of the day till the setting of the sun, and for hours beyond it, he is compelled to gather straw for Egypt's bricks, and to bake them in the world's scorching kiln, till the spring of life is dried up within, and he is ready to say, Let me but eat and drink and sleep, for there is nothing real but this endless task-work; then, how sweet to say to oneself—

*And a cloud received Him out of their sight.*

Yes, just out of sight, but as certainly as if the eye could pierce it, there is a heaven all bright, all pure, all real; there is One there who has my very nature, in it toiled as ceaselessly as the most care-worn and world-laden of us all, having no home, and no leisure so much as to eat. He is there—His warfare accomplished, His life's labour fulfilled; He is

there, at rest, yet still working, working for me, bearing me upon His heart, feeling for and feeling with me in each trial and in each temptation; and not feeling only, but praying too, with that intercession which is not only near but inside God; and not interceding only, but also ministering grace hour by hour, coming into me with that very thought and recollection of good, that exact resolution and purpose and aspiration, which is needed to keep me brave and to keep me pure. Only let my heart be fully set to maintain that connection, that spiritual marriage and union, which is between Christ above and the soul below; only let me cherish, by prayer and watching, that spirit of soberness, that freedom (to use St. Peter's strong phrase in this day's Epistle) from the intoxications of sense, which makes a man in the world and yet not of it—and I too shall at last reach that blessed home where Christ already is, and is for me!

Thus, too, when sorrow comes, when the light of this life is quenched and annihilated by reason of some fond wish frustrated or some precious possession torn away; when I am be-

ginning to say, Take away now my life, for there is nothing left to live for—then I look upward and see, if not at this moment the bow in the cloud, the bow of hope and promise, yet at least the cloud—the cloud behind which Jesus is, Jesus the Man of Sorrows, having still a thought for every struggling sorrowing man, and holding in His hand the very medicine, the very balm, for the particular sorrow, the particular void, the particular stroke and pang, of each disconsolate desolate wayfarer towards the Home and the Rest.

Such is one part of the doctrine—let us say, one utterance of the voice—of the Ascension. This is not your home. This life is not your all—no, not even now. Behind the cloud which witnessed the view of the ascending Lord, there, there is your country, your city, your church, your dwelling-place, even now. *Ye are come*, the Apostle says, *to the city of the living God, to the spirits of the perfected just, to Jesus the Mediator, and to God the Father of all.*

Comfort is strength. The very word means it. But we separate the two—in idea at least—and the Ascension has both for us. We want

not soothing only, but invigoration too. The Ascension has a voice of this kind. *The Lord working with them.* They went forth everywhere, in the strength of the Ascension—the Lord working with them. He who is Himself in heaven for us, will have us on earth for Him. We must be His witnesses. We must show forth what He is, by representing—might I say, by reproducing—Him. If He is there, in the beautiful light, in the unsullied purity, of a Presence into which can enter nothing that defiles, we, down here, must live holily, justly, blamelessly—not touching the accursed thing, but walking ever in the light as He is in the light. And so, if He, in that glorious heaven, counts nothing too small for His regard, if it be but the sigh of a contrite heart, or the tear of an orphan cheek, or the hunger of a homeless outcast, or the shame of a fallen but at last repentant life—surely, surely, we too, my brethren, as our eye seeks that cloud in the sky behind which He is exercising these tender ministries for insignificant man—we too should have a heart open and a ready hand for each distress, in body, in mind, in soul, of beings

one with us in nature, and scarcely, scarcely more vile—we, too, should hear the Ascension voice bidding us be like Christ in love as in purity—bidding us count nothing mean which He has touched, and nothing degraded which He has stooped to redeem.

Think we, all of us, of that coming day, when the cloud which concealed shall be the cloud which reveals Him. It is a solemn and touching thing to gaze into the fathomless depth of a perfectly clear sunlit or starlit sky, and lose ourselves in wonder and awe, as we vainly search out its mysterious, its ever-growing and multiplying secrets. But scarcely less solemn or less touching, to one whose Bible is in his heart, to mark that little cloud, small as a man's hand, which just specks with white the otherwise blue expanse, and which, though it seems nearer, less ethereal, less celestial far than the other, is yet the token to Christian eyes of an Ascension past and an Advent future. A cloud then received Him. Ye shall see Him coming in a cloud. Knit the two in your thoughts—knit the two in your prayers and your aspirations—live in the twofold light of the Angels' Ascension-day greeting—



*This same Jesus which is taken up from you  
into heaven—*

*Shall so come in like manner as ye have seen  
Him go.*

VIII.

THE PARABLE OF THE SWORD AND  
THE GARMENT.\*

He that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy  
one.—LUKE xxii. 36.

ST. LUKE alone records this saying. No other like it is to be found in any Gospel. Once, indeed, in commissioning the Twelve, Christ used the startling expression, *I came not to send peace, but a sword*; but there the whole context shows that He speaks not of the purpose, but of the result, of His coming—not of what He would be, but of what man would make Him; so that even that saying scarcely helps or illustrates this, where He Himself gives the command, and is understood by them literally, *He that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one.*

\* July 10, 1870.

He has reminded them of an earlier occasion, on which He had sent forth the same disciples on a short and exceptional ministry in His lifetime, and had bidden them to throw themselves confidently upon the protecting and providing care of God. In contrast with that former mission, He bids them now to equip themselves for a work needing both purse and sword. And He gives this explanation—that the Scripture is now fulfilling itself in Him, which spake of the Messiah as reckoned among transgressors. The world, which had looked on, indifferently or with curiosity, upon discourses which it could patronize as moral, and works which it could compliment as beneficent, was now stirred to open hostility by denunciations, faithful to sternness, against its irreligions and hypocrisies. Henceforth there must be war to the knife between the world and the Gospel. Christ is to be arraigned as a malefactor, and executed as a convict; therefore the disciple, not greater than his Master, can only expect opposition, and will look in vain for support. He must have his own scrip and his own sword: the days of worldly favour are past;

heaven and earth must now fight out their quarrel, with time for the arena and souls for the prize.

Yet once more, and for the last time, the carnal literalizing spirit is to vex His righteous soul even in His own. Here, at that solemn table at which the two Testaments, the Old and the New, were joining and harmonizing their symbols — relics of the Paschal Supper lying on the same board with fragments of the first Gospel Sacrament — on this night to be much remembered, when their Master is leaving them for His Passion, and every thought should have been lifted above the temporal and the earth-bound, the disciples can see nothing in His words but their bare literal import, can think of nothing but the sign and the figure, of selling and buying, under which he veiled His spiritual lesson, and answer Him, on the lowest footing of matter and form, by saying, *Lord, behold, here are two swords*—one of them to be used presently in an act of violence which, but for the ready hand of miraculous healing, might have compromised for a generation the pacific character of the Gospel. With a gesture, we

may suppose, almost of surprise, almost of sorrow, at the dulness (to the very end) of their spiritual understanding, He briefly dismisses the subject, till Pentecost shall have made it profitable, with the simple words, *It is enough*. Yes, two swords, if you will—you have missed my meaning—two swords could avail nothing in literal defence—but two will point my parable, and the light of the Spirit one day shall clear and illuminate it.

*He that hath a purse or a scrip let him take it—he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one.*

We have called it, my brethren, a parable. As such, would we enforce it to-day upon the Congregation and upon ourselves.

There are acted parables in Scripture, as well as spoken. The miracles themselves, after answering their immediate purpose as signs, become most profitable to us as parables. Certainly we shall not err in dealing with this incident as a parable—in speaking of it as the Parable of the Scrip and the Sword.

Mark the solemn emphasis with which Christ our Lord utters it. *He that hath no sword, let*

*him sell his garment, and buy one.* A man had better be without his garment than without his sword. If words have meaning—if the words of Christ have weight with us—there must be something significant, something important, something urgent here.

We shall have enough to-day in the Sword. The lesson of the Scrip would carry us rather to the thought of supplies for God's work—of provision and providence, in mind and heart, in education and discipline, for a ministry, personal or professional, requiring every aid of grace and of nature for its right discharge. But the Parable of the Sword is distinct.

And first, it says this to us—In the world you will have conflict. You will want your sword. Better lack a garment, than lack a sword.

I should despair, my brethren, if I trusted in my own words, of making this thought real to you. We all speak familiarly of the battle of life—we do the Bible thus much honour, that we adopt its strong telling phrases—but how often, in the using, do we degrade and debase them, turning men's thoughts from the mighty

verity which they enshrine to some poor mundane travesty which robs them of their virtue ! The battle of life means, for most men, the anxious struggling and pushing and climbing by which they get all they can of this world's pleasures and honours : they want no sword for this battle, but that which they can buy in the world's market, and wield under the world's banner. *Let him sell his garment for a sword*, will mean, thus interpreted, A man wants, for success, shrewdness and perseverance and indomitable resolution—better lack clothing at the opening of this campaign, than those indispensable gifts of character and education, without which he must be beaten as the fray thickens and the day advances.

My brethren, when Christ speaks of a sword, He speaks of a battle in, but not of, this world. He tells us that, when once He Himself was crucified, there should be war, for ever, between the real Gospel and the real world. It might have been otherwise, if He would have just preached the Sermon on the Mount, and put forth a hand of charity upon a few sick folk. This would have provoked no hostility. It was

when He came hand to hand with Sin, exposed it in the self-complacent, denounced it in the religious, proved what God thought of it by dying on the Cross because of it—it was then, it was thus—by being Himself (He says) *numbered with the transgressors*—that He forfeited for ever the world's countenance, and made it necessary for all Christians, if they had no sword, to sell their garments and buy one.

Marvel not at the vehemence of the words. There are two reasons for it.

First, they contradict flesh and blood. It is painful to be always armed. It makes life a perpetual effort. What should we think of living in a beleaguered house—of having an enemy, secret or open, within the household? What food would nourish, what rest would refresh, on these conditions? How then if life itself, how if this fair world, how if this pleasant converse, this delightful friendship, this seemingly innocent joy, is, to the eye that reads it truly, one insidious snare, or one perilous battle-field? What is existence worth on such terms?

Nature speaks thus, in her indolence and self-sparing. Scarce two or three in a genera-



tion really rise at Christ's call, to sell the garment for a sword. If He spoke one whit less vehemently, not one—not one—in a generation would listen. Like all His words, they are intense, they are fiery, they are burning words; but no word of His is exaggerated or overstrained. *He that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one.* Christ is vehement, because that to which He would call us is difficult, and we are deeply disinclined to it.

There is a second reason for the vehemence. Because in this field deception and self-deception are ever busily working, and he who might gird himself for mere difficulty is in danger of relaxing effort under illusion.

It is the master art of the devil to persuade us that there is no battle—that all are agreed.

He could scarcely do so in the first age. Courage was needed, but scarcely discernment, to wage the war then. While the battle raged around the body of the Crucified One, there was a sign and sacrament of it always in view. To be a Christian was to be a marked man. He could scarcely be ignorant of his need of the sword. Now we are all Christians. The

world has laid down its sword and taken up Christ's. For us Christendom is the world. It is fantastic, men say, it is fanatical, it is un-Christian, to judge now between the Church and the world. *Sirs, ye are brethren*—who shall put differences, or say, This man is, and this is not, a Christian?

The words are true, my brethren, if truly read. *We wrestle not*—even Apostles did not wrestle—*with flesh and blood*. The sword of which Christ speaks so earnestly never was borne against men. It was borne against evil spirits—against falsehood, against irreligion, against hypocrisy, against sin. But do you imagine that names or forms, professions or ceremonies, have power to end this war? Do you suppose that, when a certain Roman emperor decided to be baptized, the battle between the world and the Gospel was ended? Is God so mocked, that He counts this great London a Christian city, because its spires may be counted by hundreds, and its services each Sunday by thousands? Is there no room, here in London, for the Gospel sword? no necessity for the true Christian even to sell his garment and buy

one? The difficulty of the warfare is aggravated by its invisibility. We see not our foes, and yet they are there. The devil is not dead; he is sentenced, he is not executed.

And the world still is—christened, but not Christianized. The baptism of water carries not with it, as of course, the baptism of the Holy Ghost and of fire; and where that is not, there still must the very garment be parted with for the sword.

It is a mighty responsibility, if Christ be true, for a Christian to be about in this world. In proportion to his intermixture with it—in proportion to his place and his talent and his influence—is his want of the sword: better, for him, at all events, no garment than no sword. For he must fight either against the world or for it. He cannot be neutral. Weaker men may pass through it, and escape notice. But he is one of its constituents—for his day one of its makers. If the responsibility were but felt! Knew he but his power! Might he but desire to buy of Christ the indispensable sword! Might he but own and feel his want of it!

Alas ! how many of those whom we thus designate spend a lifetime in disproving Christ's word ! How large a part of the literature of earth is busy in erasing, in obliterating distinctions ! How keen, how formidable a sarcasm awaits him who presumes to think that Christ is so much as wanted, that hell or that heaven is real ! With what eager self-assertion will the world have it, that, in nature, in humanity, in benevolence, in activity, in what it calls charity, it has all and abounds ! How large a portion of popularity awaits him, living and dying, who lays out great gifts of genius in making light of everything — who represents serious matters as jests and pious people as fools — who thus makes religion more difficult and worldliness more self-complacent — and, on the whole, instead of buying, has rather sold, the sword of Christ for this world's garment !

It is difficult—we need not make it more difficult—to use this world as not abusing it. To mix in its business, in its society, in its interests, in its companionships—without moroseness, without superciliousness, without self-consciousness, without self-righteousness — yet, in

all, to be a Christian. So to act and so to speak, so to regulate the habits, the principles, the conversation, the life itself, as never to forget Christ, and, unobtrusively, to remind others of Him. So to associate with others, as neither to sit in judgment nor yet to deny the judgment—so to leaven the language, and mould the character, and influence the life, of younger or weaker or less decided men, as not to set up ourselves, and not to attract to ourselves, but Him, and to Him, who is the alone fountain of good, the alone satisfaction of that love which He created and implanted in us as His highest gift of grace. Difficult—most difficult: yet to this He calls us, in this most trying, most complicated, most anxious age—when He bids us sell the very garment that we may buy His sword. For His sword is a weapon not of attack only, not of defence only, but of penetrating and assimilating influence: if of attack at all, then only as that sword of the spirit, which is, being interpreted, the Word (the Revelation) of God: if of defence, then only as that which Christ Himself used in the great temptation, when again and again

He foiled the busy enemy with the retort, *It is written—It is written again*: but far, far more than either of these, an invisible, inaudible, impalpable power, piercing, by the might of love, to the very dividing of soul and spirit, discovering, to itself, the heart's secret, and winning the whole man from the dominion of evil into a peace which passeth understanding, into a happiness, not of earth, but of heaven!

I have called the text a Parable—I will end with another Parable, found in one of this day's lessons from the Old Testament.

There we read how, in a time of deepest national depression, it was the policy of the Philistine tyranny to keep Israel unarmed. The very implements of commonest husbandry were sharpened in the hostile territory—share and coulter, axe and mattock—*So it came to pass*, the narrative ends, *in the day of battle, that there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people.*

My brethren, that incident in a history thirty centuries old, is a true Parable, too often, for the time now present.

The Church of Christ, dwelling now in the world, is like that kingdom of Israel in a territory but half subdued. The world is too much with it. The Gospel leaven, instead of pervading the nominal Christendom, lies rather here and there, in patches and lumps, within it. Even they who desire to be Christians indeed, go, like those timid Hebrews, to sharpen their implements of commerce and husbandry in the Philistine territory. Who does not borrow, from a world re-named but not recreated, more, a thousandfold more, than he gives to it—echoing its maxims, speaking its words, judging its judgments, instead of faithfully exemplifying, and manfully holding, the principles which he has learned at the feet of Jesus Christ?

And in days of outward tranquillity—while the most serious events of life are its buying and selling, its planting and building, its marrying and giving in marriage—it may be the loss and the shame is scarcely felt. The Israelite plods his accustomed journey to the haunts of the Philistine, and returns with the thing he went for, unmurmuring if unsatisfied.

How shall it be in the day that must be? In that which my parable calls the day of battle—when the man is brought face to face with some foe strong and armed? it may be the demon of doubt, casting down the very foundations—it may be the demon of temptation, bidding him, constraining him, compelling him to sin—it may be the demon of desolation, stripping his home bare and his heart naked—it may be, at last it must be, death itself, with all its fearful certainties, and more frightful possibilities—what if in that day there be neither sword nor spear in his hand? What if, contented with Philistine substitutes, he has never bought of Christ Himself the one, the only invincible weapon—the weapon of an assured faith, enabling him to say from the heart, *I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to guard my deposit against that day?*

O, my brethren, leave not till the actual day of battle the purchasing of that sword! Sell your very garment now, and buy it! Whether it be the garment of pride, or the garment of carelessness, or the garment of sloth, or the garment



of worldliness, or the garment of some enveloping entangling besetting sin—sell it, discard it, fling it away, and buy of Christ, without money and without price—save that priceless price paid once for all for it for all men, the atoning the cleansing blood — that sword, of grace and faith, of love and the Spirit, which whosoever hath must be more than conqueror! Then, in this world, in all courage and in all strength, you shall be Christ's soldiers: manfully, under His banner, you shall fight the good fight and conquer: afterwards, the battle won, yours shall be the joy and the glory foreshadowed in that bright promise—

*To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.*

IX.

LIGHT BY NIGHT—THE HOLY  
TRINITY.\*

It was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night  
to these.—Exodus xiv, 20.

THE antithesis, which it seems natural so strongly to emphasize, *to them, to these*, is not indicated in the original. All that is there is, *It was a cloud and darkness, and it gave light by night—or, it lit up the night*. It may be, therefore, that we have here no record of a separate miracle—such that Israel saw as a guiding light that which to Egypt pursuing was a confusing darkness—but only the repetition of that record of a preceding chapter, *By day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light*.

\* Trinity Sunday, June 12, 1870.

This matters little to the use which I would to-day make of the text. In either case we have the closing words—

*So that the one came not near the other all the night.*

The guiding cloud severed the camp of Egypt from the camp of Israel. It marched between them. To the one it was God's presence, cheering despondency, comforting weakness, guaranteeing victory: to the other it was a perplexing, baffling, vexing apparition, betokening they knew not what, yet this at all events—that Israel had a Friend, had a Guide, had a Comforter, and they must drive after him their chariots of earth, with such hope and such might as earth fighting against heaven can muster.

This pillar of cloud and fire has in all ages, I suppose, been used as an emblem of the Divine Word. More or less clearly we find that use of it everywhere. The Psalmist says, *Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.* And the Apostle gives us a glimpse of the double aspect of God's truth, *to them* and *to these*, when he speaks of a Gospel hidden to

the lost, minds blinded against it by the god of the world, so that the glorious light of Christ, God's image, shines not, cannot shine, for them. Bright, brilliant, to the eye of Israel, it is all cloud, all darkness, to the hostile, the proud, the indifferent, the scoffing.

We desire always, in this place, to follow the Church's guidance in our choice of subjects: and therefore, on Trinity Sunday, we can scarcely turn aside altogether from that great *mystery of godliness* which both gives its name to the day, and sums up, as with a solemn *Amen*, the long series of separate truths and doctrines which has occupied the more marked and eventful half of our holy Christian Year.

It has been the aim, steadily kept in view, of this whole ministry, to present God's revelations not in a repulsive but in an attractive light—as utterances, each one, of some definite response to an outcry of conscious need—not as burdens grievous to be borne, bound arbitrarily or wantonly upon men's shoulders, but as so many reliefs, so many satisfactions, offered to labouring laden souls, out of the infinite in-

exhaustible store of Divine wisdom and Divine love. This method is as true as it is persuasive. We believe, or we could not live—we believe, or we could not bear up under the manifold weights and trials of the long, sultry or freezing, day of this lifetime—that we are in the hands, for all our sins, of One who loves us. We ask nothing else of you than that you will grant this. Or, if you cannot quite grant it, yet try it, at least, as a hypothesis. See whether it suits and falls in with the phenomena, the observations and the experiences, of your own personal being; whether it explains and accounts for them, sufficiently at least for practical purposes; whether it arranges a disorderly tangled being into something like system, and enables you to go forth to your work and to your suffering a better, a braver, a more enduring man. If it does, we claim for it the probability, at least, of a hypothesis which meets the case. We are in the hands of a living and a loving God, who, because He has compassion on us, therefore teaches; will not let us *grope in the dark at noonday like blind men*, but goes before us by day in a pillar of cloud to lead us the

way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give us light.

It is quite possible so to present the doctrine of the Trinity as that it shall simply repel. There is much on its surface to provoke objection. It sounds illogical to say, *Each one of Three Persons is God; yet not three Gods, but one God.* Many persons will hear no more. To them the magnificent old Church hymn, the *Quicumque vult*—never heard to greater advantage than in the solemn music, this Sunday and last, of our own venerable Temple Church—is a jargon of unmeaning or offensive sounds, of far-fetched antitheses and unchristian challenges. The impatience of the age, intolerant (in religion at least) of all that demands study—insisting, when it condescends to theology, that all shall be made plain not merely to the passing but to the running reader—feels a natural repugnance to an exposition which is at the same time an exploration of truth, and which opens itself thus far to attack, that the language of some two or three of its clauses is harsh to the ear and antiquated in the tone. The doctrine of the Trinity has

been damaged, no doubt, with the modern multitude, by echoes, industriously reverberated, from the Athanasian Creed.

And let us say, my brethren, with all frankness, Perish any Creed, may we but keep the Faith! It is not necessary that this form of words, or that, should be introduced into, or preserved in, our worship; if this Creed or that is a stumbling-block to one brother, let it go, in the name of charity! The American Church has discarded the Athanasian Creed, and is a Church still; honoured and panegyricized, here in England, by the very men who brand with every stigma of heresy their brother Churchmen who would do likewise. We may part (if it must be so) with the old form of words, and yet think aright of the Trinity.

Nor let us doubt—it is a comfort to believe it—that there are men to whom not a particular Creed only, but the very term *Trinity* is an offence, who yet in their hearts believe in the Divinity of Christ, and in the living grace and power of the Holy Spirit. To such men, not always accurate thinkers, but jealous in their way for God's honour, it seems perilous to im-

port, into a province so sacred, a phrase not found in Scripture—a phrase of which they see not the peculiar force and beauty, as the equivalent of Tri-unity—a protest alike against Deism and Polytheism—against the chilling bareness of the Socinian, and the utter fundamental unsoundness of the practical Tritheist. We can understand, though we share not, an unwillingness to utter the solemn invocation of the Litany, *O holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity*, on the plea that no inspired writer, no Scripture saint or apostle, literally consecrated it—that it introduces dogma into the region of devotion, and makes worship itself more difficult to the uneducated believer.

But it would be idle to deny that, deep below the questions of Athanasian Creed and enunciated Trinitarianism, there lies a real dislike, in many, to the truth itself this day commemorated. They do not refuse to Jesus Christ any title of honour or reverence short of absolute Deity. They will even speak of Him as superhuman, as Lord, as Divine. But, if they are pressed to say whether He is God, they decline or they evade the question. In like manner,



they speak without hesitation of the Holy Spirit as God's power, or grace, or influence, or energy—they confess their need of Him—they will even speak of Him as Divine. But if they are urged to tell their whole mind concerning Him, you will find that they demur to the Personality. He is a grace, He is a gift, He is a presence—He is not a Person. Thus in two points, vital to it, the doctrine of the Trinity is, for them, halt and defective—the true Deity of Christ, and the real Personality of the Spirit. They will use any vague general phrases concerning either: but it is plain that they are not receivers of the Church's doctrine, *The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God; and yet they are not three Gods, but one God.*

My brethren, knowing, from personal pastoral experience, in how many hearts this doubt lies as a trying life-long distress, let us see whether it also may not be mitigated or cleared away by a tender reverent handling.

Every word of God is at once a cloud and darkness to Egypt, and a light by night to Israel. To the caviller, to the sceptic, to the

trifler, there is no one revelation (strictly so called) which does not teem and bristle with difficulties. The doctrine of grace and the doctrine of inspiration—the revelation of redemption, and (certainly not less) the revelation of creation—each has its difficulties. Around everything, whether in Nature or Providence or Spirit, there hangs a thick veil of unexplained mystery. The lamp of Divine disclosure serves but to make the remaining surrounding darkness more obscure. The foot of knowledge penetrates but a step or two into the uncleared forest, and is confronted everywhere by a jungle of insoluble enigmas which defy its progress. This is so everywhere and in all things.

But we deny that Revelation *creates* difficulties. So far as it goes, it is, to the believing, what it calls itself—a light and a lamp. The real mysteries of our being were there before revelation: the mystery of life, the mystery of death—the mystery of an Omnipotent God resisted, and the mystery of a Holy God coexistent with evil. Whatever Revelation does, in reference to these aboriginal mysteries, is in the *direction* of explanation. Feel the weight of mystery,

and Revelation will lighten it. Kneel before God with the Bible open, and light will spring up amidst, if not in place of, the darkness.

Trinity Sunday is, in an especial sense, the Festival of Revelation. The Unity of God might be—St. Paul seems to say that it ought to be—the inference of natural conscience from the observation of nature and the experience of life. One hand made all these things. One hand holds the threads of this complex being. But no conscience and no reason, 'no observation and no experience, could possibly divine the secret of the Trinity. Therefore, first of **all**, whatever else it be, the feast we keep to-day is due to Revelation, to the Gospel, to the Bible, alone.

We observe, not without wonder, in the authentic pages of Scripture, side by side with plainest assertions of the Unity of the Godhead, intimations, equally plain, of a threefold agency, a threefold personality. Take but one verse (many might be added to it) of the great discourse closing the earthly ministry of Jesus, and see whether you can read it otherwise than in the sense given to it by the Catholic Church.

*But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of me.* Christ the Saviour, on the eve of His Passion, speaks on earth to His disciples; speaks of another Person whom He will send to them from the Father, whose office it shall be to bear witness concerning Christ. The whole doctrine of the Trinity lies in that verse. What could the Church do, what alternative was left to it, but either to shut the Bible or else to assert the Trinity?

Trinity and Unity are not contraries. The word Trinity was invented to preserve the Unity. Trinity is Tri-unity. The doctrine of Trinity Sunday is this—that Holy Scripture, while tenaciously clinging to the Unity, does present to us our Lord Jesus Christ as very God, and does present to us the Holy Spirit of God, not as a thing, but as a Person. These are the simple elements of this day's doctrine.

First, our Lord Jesus Christ is very God. That is, every attribute of God, every power and quality which goes to the definition of God, is ascribed to our Lord Jesus Christ in the

Gospels. For, if you are asked what is God, you can but answer, A living Being to whom belong certain attributes and qualities which belong to no creature—eternity, omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience, self-existence, origination of being, perfect holiness, infinite love. It is no question of words or names, which may have various shades of meaning, or which may depend altogether upon a version or upon a manuscript. What we say is, that, besides and almost apart from passages in which Divinity or Deity is ascribed by name to our Saviour, the whole tenor of the Gospels and Epistles implies the ascription to Him of powers and prerogatives which are our *idea* of God. When our Lord says, *Before Abraham was, I am*—when He promises to be with His Church alway even unto the end of the world—when He says that wherever two or three are gathered in His name there is He in the midst of them—when He promises to send into His disciples the Holy Spirit, and says that because He lives they shall live, and that He and His Father will come and make their abode with any one who keeps His word—in all these expressions, we cannot but

say that He does claim for Himself, not divinity only in a loose popular sense, as when we speak of a divine day or a divine poem, but literally and strictly (else He misleads and blasphemes) true, proper, incommunicable Deity. And therefore, having already learned to believe in Him as the Teacher come from God, having the words of God, and none else or less, for the everlasting instruction of mankind, we must find room in that Unity, which is the first principle of all religion, for the Divinity, for the Deity, of Jesus—which is the first element of the Trinity.

In like manner, when we read concerning the Holy Spirit, of whose Divinity none can doubt, such expressions as we can only interpret by Personality—such expressions as *the Comforter, the Spirit of truth*, followed by the relative (not *which* but) *who*, or the pronoun (not *it* but) *He*—such expressions as, *He shall come, He shall teach, He shall testify, He shall reprove, He shall guide you into all truth*—then we say, that, although we admit the inaccuracy of all language, and especially of theological language—admit, in other words,

that phrases like Person and Substance are necessarily inadequate and incorrect in application to things Divine—yet we should be guilty of blindness and deafness, irreverent and wilful, if we refused to recognize types of eternal verities in such terms used by the Divine Master concerning the Holy Ghost—we should be erasing and expunging for ourselves whole lines, clauses, and sentences of Revelation, if we declined to speak of Him as Christ has spoken, or to adhere to the doctrine of the Personality of the Spirit, on the same reasoning and with the same earnestness which asserts the Divinity, the Deity, of the Saviour. And this is the second element of the doctrine of the Trinity.

If any one should contend that, though the premises or elements may be true, the conclusion or (at least) the combination is presumptuous; we remind him of the formula of Baptism, resting upon the express sanction of Jesus, *Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*; or of the solemn words of Apostolical benediction, *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of*

*God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all.* Wherever grace and peace are invoked upon a Church, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, there is the assertion of the Saviour's Deity: wherever the Spirit is said to search hearts, or to make intercession, or to help infirmities, or to know the things of God, there is the assertion, in personal experience, of that which has no doubt its ground in verities and existences deeper than man's words, but which, for lack of, or waiting for, a more accurate phrase, the Church throughout her generations calls the Personality of the Holy Ghost.

It may not be without its use—God grant it—thus, on one great Festival in each year, to sketch briefly before you the proof of the Trinity. But we will not end with such arguments—no, not if they be, as we believe them to be, the simple utterances of God's Word. Rather will we urge upon you, in conclusion, the thought suggested by the text—that this revelation, like each one of God's secrets told, although it may be dim darkness to the contemptuous arguer, has ever given light by night to the camp of the journeying, struggling, militant Israel.



Leave out of sight for one hour the Divinity of Jesus, and darkness settles again upon the soul which He died, which He lives, to redeem. When the stroke of death comes—as it has come, with startling suddenness, in these last days, to an old and faithful servant of this Church—what shall support, what shall strengthen, then, but faith in a Saviour absolutely Divine? He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows—He hath taken away sin and brought in everlasting righteousness—how? by what title? by an immaculate human virtue? by an obedience availing for Himself, and leaving something over for sons and brothers less exceptionally meritorious? Nay, but for a higher, deeper, yet simpler cause—because He is the Lamb of God, One with the Father, able therefore to abolish death, and to bring life and immortality to light for all who believe.

Leave out of sight for one hour the Personality of the Spirit, and darkness settles again upon the soul of which He is the Light because the Life. When the call of duty sounds aloud in hearts conscious of weakness—as it sounds, on this day of Ordinations, in a thousand self-

misgiving sin-accusing hearts—bidding us awake to a life of devotion, or buckle on God's armour for an unequal, a life-long conflict with marshalled hosts of evil—what then shall be our stay, our hope, our courage, if it be not the living life-giving grace of a Spirit searching the heart and interceding for it, within it, with a yearning inaudible to man but omnipotent with God? Yes, we may listlessly dream or purposelessly loiter—float down the stream of time, wanting neither rudder, nor compass, nor haven—for these things nature may suffice, or chance, or destiny: but when a work is proposed to us, and we must do it or die, then we want that help, and must have it, which only a Trinity in Unity can supply—the presence of an Almighty Father, assured to us by the sacrifice of a Divine Son, and brought home day by day to the anxious, drooping, throbbing heart, by the near, the conscious indwelling of a Divine, an Eternal, a Personal Spirit.

## INFALLIBILITY.

And they shall be all taught of God.—JOHN vi. 45.

**T**HERE are two words which cause uneasiness to some serious minds—Unity, and Infallibility. This has been, again and again, the double lever employed by the Church of Rome to make proselytes from our communion.

Where is your unity? she asks of the incipient doubter, and, Where is your Infallibility? The Reformed Churches, she says, neither possess the one, nor so much as profess the other. The Divine Head of the Church could not have willed this, could not have willed this rending of the seamless coat, could not have willed this destitution of a representative authority below. There must be a unity, if there

is to be a Church : in order to unity there must be infallibility.

Some weeks ago we dwelt upon Unity : to-day we will ponder Infallibility.

We saw where Unity was not—not in uniformity, whether of language or ritual—not in stereotyped utterances to God or concerning God—not in the inaccurate English, *one fold*, but in the grander truer original, *one flock*.\* Where the *one Shepherd* is, there is unity ; a unity not of name but of substance ; not of earth's divided tongues, but of heaven's pure air, cloudless sky, and hearts' voices. We felt, as we spoke and listened that day, that that unity for which man so often sighs, the unity which is the lament of synods and platforms, is a unity valueless and to be dispensed with : unity is not lost because nonconformity has entered : wherever there are souls resting on one Person, and lives instinct with one Spirit, there is unity : any other unity would rather mislead, distract, at last dissipate.

In like manner I will say of Infallibility, in the sense in which men are talking of it to-day,

\* John x. 16 : *μία ποιμνη*, not *μία αὐλή*.

that, instead of being ashamed that we have it not—instead of apologizing for a Reformation which cut us off from it—instead of seeking substitutes for it, in general councils, the four or the seven, in the *consensus* of Catholic antiquity, or the *semper et ubique* of an œcumenical creed—all so many shifts and evasions of an uneasy sensitive Anglicanism—we count it the very glory of our Gospel that it neither offers nor sanctions it; that it expressly forbids all such confidences, and makes it treason against Christ and the Spirit so much as to ask for an earthly Rabbi or to yearn after a human infallibility. The Gospel promise, repeated again and again, both in the prophecies of the Old Testament and in the revelations of the New, is not, I will give you a man to represent Me; a man whose rule shall be God's law, and his enunciation of doctrine God's oracle; but—

*All shall know me, from the least to the greatest—Your servants and your handmaids shall prophesy—I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh—All thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children.*

*It is written in the Prophets, Christ says here, And they shall be all taught of God.*

You will find three leading words in this brief saying.

1. First, the word *taught*. They shall be *taught*. What is teaching?

Christ speaks evidently of an effectual teaching. It is not the going to school, it is not the listening to lectures, it is not the submitting to instruction. Men had always done that : Jewish Rabbis taught, and Hebrew boys sat at their feet : it needed not prophecy to tell that the schoolmaster would one day be abroad ; scarcely, though prophecy has stooped to foretell it, that in the world's latest age *many should run to and fro, and knowledge should be increased*. The being taught implies, on Christ's lips, a successful result.

There are two other words in Greek, akin (I cannot but suppose) by derivation, to the word which means teaching ; at all events, they will furnish us with a lively picture of what effectual teaching is—the one means *to divide*, and the other means *to kindle*.

To teach is to distribute. To break up for

use. To parcel out the component portions—for every truth is a compound of elements—so that the process shall be the apprehension of the parts, and the result the comprehension of the whole. It is the opposite of that lading of the memory with lumps and heaps of information, which is what the ignorant instructor may call teaching, but the wise educator knows to be as vain as it is irksome. Distribution is one part of teaching. To learn, to know, we must divide. We cannot know the compound, of which we know not the parts.

Again, to teach is to kindle. Enthusiasm is half the work. The educator who is not on fire with the interest of his subject can but half teach. He must glow, and he must kindle. The pupil must catch fire. The cold, impassive, dry, lifeless teacher may have his reward in pay, or in a sense of duty done—he will not find it in interest awakened, thoughts aglow, and minds quickened.

They whose lives have been given to Education know well the difference between teaching and teaching. They think little of the taking in of sounds—of the respectful demeanour of

wandering thoughts—even of the charging of the memory for what may be a *vain repetition*—even of the power to give out again, in precise form, of the very thing taken in. All this there may be, and no learning—no being taught. We hail even a thoughtful mistake rather than an unreasoning correctness. The artist's eye is quick to discern between the servile copy, however exact, and the far less trim, less finished sketch, which showed the independent idea and the individual genius.

Now when we apply this principle to the matter before us—the knowledge of Divine things—we see at once its bearing upon the theory of a human infallibility.

Supposing that there were upon earth an authority not to be gainsaid; supposing that this were the Church's condition—a Pope or a Council (it scarcely matters which) invested with plenary power to lay down the law upon religious subjects; supposing that on every topic on which controversy arose we could refer ourselves for decision to a living centre of unerring direction—would the prophecy of Christ be any nearer its fulfilment, *They shall be all taught of*



*God?* Would men be taught? Without entering upon the question, What—the question whether the subject of teaching were profitable or puerile—would it be teaching? There might be assent to the phrase, to the dogma; there might be silence, respectful, dutiful silence, on the part of those who felt that they understood not; there might be a submission of the will to a yoke of authority which it is sin to dispute: all we say is, that there is here, thus far, neither teaching, nor learning; no fulfilment of the promise, *They shall be taught: heavy burdens, grievous to be borne*, may be laid upon the intellect or conscience of the faithful; but there is here neither the dividing nor the kindling—neither the apprehension of the mind nor the enthusiasm of the soul. As there may be, in worship, a dead uniformity which is no unity, so may there be in doctrine. That creed which is imposed by authority is no part of the man: other qualities may be exercised by it, obedience, reverence, even devotion, but not mind: there is nothing learnt—the man is not taught.

This, indeed, is a difficulty inherent, to a certain degree, in all words used as the vehicle of

Divine knowledge. St. Paul speaks of all language concerning God as a riddle hereafter to be read—as a reflection, in the mirror, of objects not to be seen till we throw off the body. The true knowledge of God, he tells us, is the love of God. In that there is no illusion, and no inexactness. But in all statements of doctrine there is a necessary incorrectness. Judge then what is gained by an enforced identity ! Judge what is the worth of that infallible authority which at best can but tell us what we must say—in what particular dress and figure we must wrap up the truth, which, to do us good, must be taken into the heart by love ! How much greater may be the reality of agreement, even in thought much more in spirit, between two men who utter not the same dogma, yet love the same Person, than between the loudest, most vehement, most servile pronouncers of a Shibboleth prescribed to them by authority !

2. They shall be taught of *God*.

Authority, as such, is no teacher. If infallibility teaches, it condescends to a work not its own. To establish an infallible authority is beside the mark of teaching. God,

God Himself, is the teacher. Why? Because He alone is within. *Line upon line*, as it is written, *here a little and there a little*, as the understanding and the heart can bear it—even as it is written of Christ upon earth, *He spake as they were able to hear it, and when they were alone expounded all things to His disciples*; with that kindling, too, of which we have spoken, that fire of the Spirit which is enthusiasm and which is life—thus God teaches; *they shall be taught*, not of man, but of God, this, this is the promise!

And may not the very statement itself preclude the obvious cavil, Men believing themselves taught of God arrive at different, opposite results of the teaching? One man, taught of God, holds this doctrine, another that—both men are equally sincere, equally devout, yet both doctrines cannot be true? We dare almost to say that both the doctrines may be true: the expression of one, the expression of the other, may be inexact—may be that riddle, that enigma, of which St. Paul speaks: yet for the man, the honest, humble, devout man, each and both may be true, because the Divine teaching is as man

can bear it—has degrees, has stages, has varieties of growth. Of all that is essential, of all that is vital, we believe the promise, even now, even in the present, to be realized, *When He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He, teaching individually, teaching inwardly, shall guide you, each and all of you, into all truth.*

I stay not to remark how even the human infallibility has its discords and its schisms. These taunts at other communions are not profitable. Rather would I say this, which is all practical, Exchange not this teaching of God for any other. I know it may be said, God employs instruments; and if it pleases Him to erect upon earth a chair of authority, and to place in it an infallible man, then God's teaching must be looked for, God's voice must be listened to, in that quarter, in that form. But how directly is all this opposed to Christ's express words, spoken to the Apostles, spoken to Peter, *But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren: And call no man your Father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven: Neither be ye called masters—leaders, or guides,—for one is your*

*Master, even Christ ! It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God.*

Blessed promise !

For lack of this Divine, this inward teaching, many are ever learning, yet never taught. They have all else—they read books, they hear sermons, they follow any new preacher who will profess lessons of life, they will run hither and thither in search of truth, in quest of salvation—they have not *this* ! It explains, yet explains not. Mystery hangs around the not having. But at least we see where the want is. They are not taught of God. Peradventure, if we knew all, we could say even why they have not.

God's teaching is as various as His working.

He teaches sometimes by human lips. Though we allow not a Rabbi, yet we depend much upon an educator. God has His schools on earth, in which wise minds teach, holy lives guide, gentle hearts influence, and for which dutiful pupils give thanks to Him as for the most valuable of their whole life's gifts. And though we admit not a popedom, yet we confess a ministry. A ministry then most honoured, then most suc-

cessful, when it most entirely forgets itself—when it says to its hearers, God, God is the Teacher; I may plant, another may water—God, God alone, gives the increase.

He teaches, most of all, by the Gospel. There is a word abroad in the earth—a message, an utterance, a voice brought into it by His Son from heaven—a voice which is all God's—speaking to the whole of man, and speaking (if the phrase might be pardoned) the whole of God; speaking not from His truth only, or from his justice, or from His power, or from His love, but from all, and the whole of all; also speaking to man, not in his strength only, not in his weakness only, not only as he was created, nor only as he is fallen, but as all that he is—in ruins, yet the fragment and ruin of the Divine; speaking to his mind, and his reason, and his heart, and his soul, all in one—the Gospel is thus God's book, as the ministry is God's interpreter.

But even this scarcely touches what Christ says in the text.

*At sundry times, in divers manners, God spake of old time.* The Law was God's voice, the Prophet was God's interpreter.

Yet the promise of the text was some new thing. There was a teaching of God which was altogether of the Gospel. *The dispensation of the fulness of times* had one thing distinctive. God had always spoken within man, taught within man, by conscience—by the Spirit, too, the Holy Spirit, quickening conscience and making God vocal in it. But there was a gift of the Spirit more intimate, more immediate, more powerful still—insomuch that it was written by the Evangelist St. John, *The Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified*. It is of this special gift of the Holy Ghost—realized in Paul, realized in Peter—realized (not less truly if less perfectly) in Augustine, in Luther, in Henry Martyn, in Wilberforce, in Simeon, in Keble, in all the holy men and women who at this day are walking in the fear of God and witnessing for Him to their generation—it is of this, above all, that Jesus speaks here, when He gives this as the sum and substance of divine prophecy, *It is written, And they shall be all taught of God*.

God makes way for this voice by all His dealings with us. Now in sorrow, now in glad-

ness; now by the thunder of a European war, now by the still small voice of a domestic loss or blessing; now by a sense of want which Christ alone can fill, now by a conviction of sin which Christ alone can comfort; now by some experience of the hollowness of earth's satisfactions, now by the breaking down of earth's trusts, the seeing an end of earth's perfections—in all these, and a thousand other channels of His inscrutable working, God comes to us, God touches the spring of being, God shows us the poverty, the nothingness of human infallibilities, and constrains us to feel that it is with Him—Him personally—Him only—that we have indeed to do. When this is so—when He thus deals with us—then we thank Him with an unfeigning heart, as for other mercies, so for this above all, that He has not handed us over to the guidance of any human authority, but has taken our hearts and our lives into His own school, and made good the words to our soul's knowledge—*And they shall be taught of God.*

3. There remains yet one word—the least, yet the largest—it is the word *all*. They shall be *all* taught of God.



The explanation of it is at hand. One Prophet said, *They shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord*—it shall not be necessary, it shall not be to be waited for—for *all shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest.* And another Prophet said, *Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.* In other words, God shall no longer raise up one man to be the teacher of a generation—shall no longer consecrate Shiloh or Bethel as the scene, shall no longer commission Samuel or Isaiah as the mouthpiece, of His self-manifestation—He will reveal Himself directly, by an immediate, a personal intuition, to the soul that seeks and is athirst for Him. *Whosoever will may take the water of life*; and that water of life is the presence of the Spirit.

Let us not be ashamed of, but glory in, our Protestantism! Let us make no compromise with the lying vanities of Sacerdotalism, whether its home be Italy or England. But rather say boldly, say strongly, yet say it in charity—I want no chair of human authority, I want no

voice of human infallibility ; I want no person sitting in God's temple, calling himself whether Christ's vicar or God's vicegerent—these things are all foreign, all repugnant, to the spirit of my Christianity—these things are so many veils and barriers between me and my God—my Church is not poor because she has them not—it would be her shame, her deformity, if she thought she had them. It is written in the prophets—and Christ, the Lord of the prophets, condescends to endorse the saying—In Gospel days they shall be all taught of God. I will not disparage, I will not part with, I will not explain away, the saying which tells me that my own soul is, under Christ, the priest of my sanctuary ; and that when, in faith and prayer, I draw nigh to God, I do so in virtue of the one Sacrifice once offered, and in the power of the Holy Ghost given to all who ask Him.

Yet let us take heed—it is no superfluous caution—that, while we glory in, we also use, our Protestantism. Are we taught of God ? Repudiating superstition, are we men of faith ? Do we find God, love God, commune with God, live to God ? Oh saddest, most deplorable,

of all condemnations, to have held a pure faith in an impure conscience—to have boasted of Christ, to have fought for the Gospel—not to have known Him, not to have walked by it.

Lord Jesus, they that are taught of God prove it by coming unto Thee. Pray for us, that we may be drawn to Thee by that effectual teaching; and, coming to Thee, may not be cast out.

XI.

HERE AM I : SEND ME.

Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I : send me.—  
ISAIAH vi. 8.

THE great Prophet of the Old Testament describes in this Chapter his call and mission. It is a natural question, why then is not the sixth the first Chapter of his Book? A hasty critic instantly suspects disarrangement, and suggests transposition. Pause a moment. Is there not a deep truth here? Has it not befallen many a life to take its first steps, even in the way of duty, before that mightiest revolution which is the sight of God? Who has not needed—what dedicated, consecrated man has not needed—a second, a third, a tenth start, in the race set before him?

Isaiah had spoken—spoken eloquently, spoken

mightily—in the name of God. No prophecies of his Book are more thrilling, more touching, than those earliest of all. We might almost say that, for several chapters after this before us, there is almost less of rush, of pathos, of fire, than in the five preceding it. Yet here first he receives that direct, that personal commission which a man can find nowhere but in God's presence; with which he goes forth, whatever his work, a new man; without which, he remains to the end of life one who has heard of God by the hearing of the ear, but has never seen Him.

The event of this chapter is called Isaiah's Vision. What is a vision? To some minds it suggests the idea of excitement, of fancy, of illusion, perhaps of imposture. A visionary is an enthusiast; there we leave him. Yet, remember, *enthusiasm* itself has a magnificent derivation; it is but another word for *inspiration*; an *enthusiast* is a man with God in him. So is it with the word *vision*. *Vision* is *sight*. Vision is the synonym of that intuition which is the very strongest and directest form of knowledge. Vision is the piercing

through that cloudy murky atmosphere of sense and seeming, in which the world dwells contentedly; and the penetration of that real, that bright, that infinite heaven which is the dwelling-place of the true, of the eternal, of God. *These things spake Esaias*, says St. John, describing this very vision, *when he saw His glory, and spake of Him*. Vision is sight—the sight of the Invisible One.

Do you suppose that the real thing is this life of semblance, of shadow, of disquiet, of change? Do you imagine that there is nothing so certain, nothing so substantial, as this time, of days and years, which is gone while you live it, and is not? Shame—but pity too—for the man who thinks so! *He* is the dreamer—not the man who has had a sight, were it but for a moment, of the life within, beyond, above this life—of Him who inhabiteth eternity, and whose name (as this vision shall tell us) is Holy.

It was *the year that king Uzziah died*. Isaiah would keep the date of the year in which he saw God. It was a marked year for the world. If not the very year, it was within two or three of it, in which Rome was founded. Surely an im-

portant event for mankind in all senses, for good and evil!

Isaiah knew not the significance of the year in that aspect. But for his nation, as well as for himself, it was an eventful time. An old king, whose reign had been a second Solomon's for national glory, but who had himself, for a large part of its fifty-two years' duration, lived alone, a leper, excommunicated, a royal outcast—in *a several house*, as the sacred record has it—represented by a regent son, was now passing to his rest. England remembers just such a reign. What the year 1820 was to England, that, in more than one respect, was *the year that king Uzziah died* to Judah.

God often chooses marked seasons for His greatest self-manifestations; makes individual souls associate eventful days with their own more personal history. It was so with Isaiah. In that memorable year, nationally speaking, he himself was to see God.

There was one spot upon earth which an Israelite recognized as the natural scene of such a vision. There was a building, rich still, when Isaiah wrote, with all the wealth of Ophir and

Lebanon—a building of which it is difficult indeed, from description, to appreciate fully either the proportions of the architecture or the effect of the decoration—but which, at all events, had within it that mysterious shrine which but one man in each generation, and but once, he, in each year, was suffered to set his foot in; that shrine, for approaching which, censer in hand, king Uzziah himself, king but not priest (did the thought occur perhaps to Isaiah, when he connected Uzziah's death with his own vision?) had been smitten with his life-long leprosy, and was thrust out by the priests—*yea, himself hasted to go out, because the Lord had smitten him*; that shrine, of which Isaiah, we must suppose, being neither high-priest nor of priestly descent, knew scarcely more than we know—knew certainly but the blank outer walls, had never seen for himself so much as the containing excluding curtain—knew this only, that inside those blank walls, inside that unseen curtain, there was the ark of God—in it the unearthly tablets—over it the composite winged figures, symbolizing creative skill and angelic ministry; knew just this, and knew, as we know, but of course with



a more patriotic realization, that that Holy of Holies was made after a pattern shown by God Himself in the holy mount, and designed to typify unspeakable verities to be the subject of revelation in due time.

There then it was—we might have been sure that it would be so—that Isaiah, in this vision—which was no fancy, but an unveiling of things more real than earth and sky—was for once, for everlasting remembrance, to see God.

Earthly kings might come and go, reign gloriously, then shamefully suffer and be hidden away, at last die; but there, on a throne high and imperishable, there, through all vicissitudes, is seated Israel's King. His train fills the temple. The skirts of that robe—as it was with the Incarnate One upon earth—whosoever touches shall be perfectly whole. Therefore they fill the temple. Every worshipper, in spirit and in truth, may touch the hem or the border.

And around, or above, this throne, there are seen the glorious beings who people God's heaven. Yes, earth's ministries, sacred (as we call them) or secular, may be well or ill discharged; human infirmity clogs, human sin de-

files them : but God shall not want, through our unfaithfulness, a service pure and devoted. Angels excel in strength, and take from His own lips, with joyous alacrity the constraining voice of His words.

With joyous alacrity. Yet is the alacrity the least part of the Angel's strength. Each one had six wings—yet but two of those wings are for flight ! Reverence is the office : *with twain he covered his face, with twain he covered his feet with twain he did fly.*

Read here the confusion of that utilitarian creed which is the worship at once and the weakness of the Church of this nineteenth age. Oh for that spirit of reverence, that grace of meditation, that earnestly sought, that well-used retirement, which was once the wisdom of pastors and the strength of saints ! There alone can a jaded and foot-sore Church find a new vitality ; there, unless some novelty of grace be granted her, will she seek it, will she accept it, no more !

But the reverence itself is busy in devotion. *One cried unto another, in responsive, in antiphonal utterance, Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord*

*of hosts*—He to whom belong, as His disciplined marshalled armies, all the world-wide powers of nature, of intelligence, of soul, of will, of action—*the whole earth is full of His glory*. That glory which was faintly typified, in the great Jerusalem dedication, by the visible light which drove the very priests out of the temple, is, in deed, a manifestation of God's presence, everywhere diffused, in the manifold, the myriad operations of His Providence and of His grace.

Comforting, at once, and terrible, was this thought—it must be so—to one who would be all God's. Comforting—he shall not lack the Presence, without which work is vanity, and service nothingness. Yet terrible too—what is he? *A man*, Isaiah says, *of unclean lips—dwelling too among a people of unclean lips*. Shall we read it as saying, *even* the lips—not the thoughts only nor the actions? Or shall we remember rather our Lord's words, *That which cometh out of the man defileth*? Shall we think, each one, of the thousand ways in which words testify and breathe and propagate defilement—how we ourselves, we who have been here singing God's praise, have employed

this same faculty of speech in echoing the vanities and the idolatries and the lying flatteries of earth, and in denying (if not in word, yet in a thousand more powerful influences) the being and the majesty and the judgment of the Eternal? Oh we can all understand how, when God at last shows Himself—here for conviction, or hereafter for judgment—not last but first among the thoughts accusing not excusing us will be the recollection of our use of speech—that which Scripture calls man's glory, prostituted by our sin into a shame and a pestilence!

It is *the sight of the King* which works conviction. Isaiah had spoken for God—powerfully, majestically—not in hypocrisy, not in self-glory—now his *eye seeth Him*, and he *abhors himself*, yea, *in dust and ashes*.

It is not by wild vague words of humility and self-reproach—it is not even by looking within, and dragging forth to friends or confessors the ugly secrets of conscience—that we shall really acquire that sense of sin which is the family feature (so to say) of the saved. One half-hour of Divine communion—one resolute determined entering of the Holy of Holies,

that we may see the Lord seated upon His throne, and the holy Angels veiling face and feet as they sing His praise—will do more for us in the wholesome work of self-abasement and self-aborrence; because it will bring us into the light which alone makes manifest, and show us, in the very act of condemning, the beauty of the holiness which condemns.

Yet even the sense of sin might paralyze, being alone. The man who is to do God's work must not only see himself in God's light, but see also how the light which exposes is a light also to purify and to transform. There is an altar of Divine sacrifice kindled from heaven—it stands, not within, but in front of the Divine dwelling—and each coal of it is for the purging of the conscience. God sends His messenger to fetch from that altar, which is, being interpreted, the Cross of Jesus, a live coal to touch the unclean lips and take away the iniquity which else would preclude the service.

To whom need I stay to interpret my parable? Who does not read here that revelation of personal forgiveness through the blood of Jesus, which I would beseech every one to make his own ere he lay himself on his bed this night!

So God Himself has prepared and equipped His messenger. And now that voice which has buzzed in his ears aforetime without articulate sound or speech, shall become for him a question which addresses him and must be answered—I heard the voice of the Lord saying, *Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?* Then said I, *Here am I*—I, a man of unclean lips, dwelling among a people of unclean lips, but a man, too, touched now with the live coal taken with the tongs from off Thine altar, and therefore having an ear to hear and a voice to answer—

*Here am I: send me!*

I fancy—I more than fancy—that there are some here present in the Congregation, whom this opening year finds in an attitude of enquiry, in a posture of attention, as to God's will and their duty. It is a high privilege for any man—but a solemn trying responsibility too—to be set to minister to such a spirit. God helping me, I will do it—do it in uttermost weakness, yet in reliance upon strength—saying two things, two only, to-day—

First, what does God ask?

And then, how shall we answer Him?

1. *Whom shall I send?* God wants a person. God cannot send a thing, nor a sound, nor a machine—no, nor even a book. Wonderful! For God's real works—by which we mean now His messages to souls—He must find a man. In this particular instance, God had a message of warning and judgment for a nation. But we make too broad a distinction between collective and individual works. I know not what a nation is, in any spiritual aspect, but an aggregate of persons. And I know not how a nation can be powerfully influenced, for good or evil, but through persons. There is a collective life, a national responsibility, I know: but it is only by untying the faggot, by resolving the compound, that we can deal with it or conceive of God as dealing. Individual life, personal action, stamps the community—makes it this or that as a whole. Look into history; judge by observation. Is it not the man who moves the nation? Is it not the individual who makes the age?

We say then that Isaiah's work was that of dealing for God, with his people, as with unit

souls. It was the very same work, substantially, which God has always on hand. Read not your Bible in that dreamy, that unreal spirit, which carries its teaching quite out of the world you live in! Read Isaiah as you would listen to a sermon from this pulpit, as you would listen to an address on some stirring life-like topic to an audience of living men! So reading, you will find that it has a voice for you! And that voice is a question. God ponders, as it were—looking down upon the children of men, looking down upon the several members of this Congregation—ponders with Himself and asks aloud, *Whom shall I send?*

He even represents Himself as in council, surrounded by those who have His will for theirs—by those who take His view of earth's discords and miseries and sins, and are deeply engaged, with Him, in looking into and grappling with them—and says, *Who will go for us?*

Marvellously human, like all His utterances! Persuasive too, deeply touching, if there be but the heart in us!

You will say, This is all vague—tell us what God wants us for.



A plain, direct, practical question—let us answer it.

No doubt, God has magnificent concerns on hand, with which we cannot intermeddle. Every disclosure of science—telescope and microscope equally—tell us this. But what God wants us for is, not to aid Him in guiding the stars in their courses, or in giving growth to the vegetable or life to the animal. For us, God's business is with human lives—human souls. God's mission is to these. We do not regard as insignificant any ministry to the lowest part of these. The physician has his ministry—it is very like one part of Christ's. The lawyer has his ministry—if he understands it, it is perhaps even higher than the other. Every profession—every function, every department, of each—is a mission and a ministry too.

That which God has in view—we would say it very reverently, that which God is perpetually taking counsel upon—is the welfare, the happiness—and, if either have been disturbed, then the restoration, the rectification, the redemption, the salvation—of the lives which He created, of the souls which He has made. When He says,

*Whom shall I send?* He enquires, in other words, Who among the living will lend a hand to this work? Who will live, not for himself—not a selfish self-contained life—but for God and his brother? Who, amongst these living dying people, thanking God for Creation and Redemption, keeping Christmas as a joyful birthday, professing to expect the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting—who, of all these, is sufficiently in earnest, sufficiently means what he says, to be willing to *go for us*—to undertake a mission to a few, to one or two, to one single soul, out of himself?

Multitudes, in these days, stand about in the great market-place of this world, waiting for a hiring. If you ask, *Why stand all the day idle?* the answer is ready, *No man hath hired me.* Multitudes talk of a mission—man's mission, woman's mission—write books about it—but themselves stand idle still. When the question sounds, as now, in their ears, *Who will go?* one excuse after another is forthcoming, and the bulk of the audience hear no voice whatever which they recognize and realize as God's voice to them.

I say nothing in disparagement of those greater schemes, of benevolence or evangelization, of which our century is so prolific. We would bid God-speed to all. Only we would entreat you not so to speak of these as to make us think that, if we cannot do just this, or just that, therefore we must be drones and idlers in God's work-field. My object now is a practical object for the humblest, meanest, most giftless person among us. I will speak very plainly, and say this. Go to your Clergyman, and ask him to give you one cottage to visit, or one sick person to read to, or one child to teach to read. Make that your mission. Or say this. Have you one friend whom you see or suspect to be going astray, to be listening to some evil counsellor, to be tied by the chain of some bosom sin? Give yourself no rest till you have reclaimed him. Oh, is there no one of you, who knows something of the magic charm of friendship? no one who has himself been rescued from some brink or margin of evil by the loving voice of one who with unselfish ~~self-less~~ affection called him, plucked him, dragged him away? I speak to

many whose hearts are still tender—whose souls are still open to the pleading voice of youthful love—I bid them try upon others an influence which they know would be omnipotent with themselves. God says, *Who will go?* Be jealous to be the one sent!

Says He not the same word concerning ourselves? Does He who cares for another not care for you? Has He no thought for your precious beautiful soul—yes, precious still in His sight, and beautiful, though it be much clouded, defaced, sullied by sin? Is there no such thing as a mission to yourself? Can you resist the appeal which marks, more strongly than any, God's care, God's love, when He calls to you yourself, and asks, Why, Oh, why, wilt thou die? Be thine own messenger, thine own apostle of love—and come back to me, fetch thyself back, from the far, the homeless, the havenless shore?

2. How shall we answer Him?

Is there no response, none ever, none now, in souls so made as to rest only in God? Does not one heart answer, *Here am I—send me?* Yes—I see, I feel, that there is a movement—there

is a still small voice, there is a rushing mighty wind, passing through your souls, and stirring, here and there, in you and in you, the impulse, the resplution, of grace! Hinder it not! quench not the Spirit! Fan into a flame the spark of good desire—it comes not to every one! Believe the love which pleads with you—and when the voice says, *Seek ye my face*, answer at once, *Thy face, Lord, will I seek!*

*Whom shall I send? Lord, here am I—send me!*

XII.

NEUTRALITY.\*

Refrain from these men, and let them alone.—ACTS v. 8.

GAMALIEL counsels neutrality. Great interest attaches to St. Paul's tutor. He was a famous Jewish Rabbi. St. Luke describes him as *a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people*. St. Paul considers it a sufficient proof of his own early orthodoxy, to say that he was *brought up at the feet of Gamaliel*. We must not conclude, from his conduct on the occasion before us, that he was in any sense really open to Christian conviction. A prayer of his is on record, composed (it is said) with special reference to Christians, beginning with the words, *Let there be no hope to them who apostatize from the true religion*. Yet, on this one occasion at

\* August 7, 1870.

least, he shows a quality rare among Pharisees—not universal, alas! among Christians—that of fairness, of calmness, of candour. The infant Gospel was indebted to him for the liberty, perhaps the life, of St. Peter himself. He bids the Sanhedrim, his fellow-councillors, *refrain from these men, and let them alone*—wait and see what becomes of Christianity—whether it will stand the test of time—whether it has this mark of truth upon it, permanence—or whether, like a hundred ephemeral ebullitions of human enthusiasm, it spends itself, dies out, and comes to nought.

The argument, my brethren, was not only useful—it was just. The test of time is a true criterion. There is scarcely an event, there is scarcely a character, there is scarcely an action, of which the first idea is the final. The just judge must wait. How will the same thing look five years later?

In the hurry and agitation of present circumstances, especially if they have any certain or probable bearing upon ourselves, we rush to conclusions, to inferences, to judgments, as conjectural as they are uncharitable. You can

scarcely mention the man or the thing, of any moment or interest, within your recollection, as to which public opinion has been constant and unchangeable from the first day until now. It is so in reference to scandals, and suspicions of scandals : the first rumour is portentous, terrific, damnatory : further enquiry brings palliations, modifications, sometimes acquittals. We see here one reason, amongst many, for the lingering, almost limping, step of our judicial procedure : the choice lies, generally, between tardy justice and speedy injustice : real facts are only evolved by degrees ; and even the wholesale indignation of well-intentioned bystanders would enforce many an unrighteous verdict, if it were not first left to cool. Both for good and for evil, men are apt to decide first and to hear afterwards. We see it in private matters ; we see it sometimes on a larger scale.

In the first panic of the Indian mutiny who did not impute slackness, indifference, incapacity to the man who refused to let slip the dogs of vengeance for an indiscriminate retribution ? With the blood of Englishmen and Englishwomen crying from the ground, what need (we



said) of nice discrimination, of legal proof? the crime is patent, be the punishment signal. That man lived—let me rather say, died—to have the praise of being almost the only Englishman in India whose head was not turned nor his hand shaken by a provocation which none felt more keenly; who used his courage in tempering passion, and toiled night and day in the thankless yet resolute enterprise of judging in the name of his country a righteous judgment.

Thus it is commonly—thus it may be this day—in reference to the causes and authorships of great wars. I cannot presume to apply the text to a subject so full of excitements as that which is now prominent in all minds. But we must remember that four years ago we cried out as loudly against one ambition as we now denounce its rival. The spectacle of a united Germany has reconciled us to the aggressions by which it was consolidated; and it may be—I have no telescope of the future—it may be—though I do not think it—that ten years hence we may count a new French frontier as natural as we now count it a wicked lust of getting to fight for it. There is a test of time. Gamaliel

appeals to it. Happy the man, fortunate the nation, that can rely upon that rectification of the hasty judgment of the instant !

Let us be strong with ourselves, my brethren, to enforce inwardly the principle of neutrality. A nation finds it difficult. On the right hand and on the left the temptations to swerve from it are legion ; its limits are hard to define ; its infractions are as subtle as they are perilous. Yet it must be done, if the quarrel is not yours ; you must refrain from both combatants, and let them alone. For private men it is a Christian duty. God is the Judge. He makes not us, sinful men, rulers or dividers over our brethren. Before justice is charity ; and charity, we know, *beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.*

Gamaliel's application of the test of time was to the Gospel.

Nothing could more seriously shock received opinion, nothing could more directly affront religious orthodoxy, nothing could more defiantly impugn constituted authority, than did the confession, at that day, that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ of God. This was to say that

Roman magistrates, Jewish priests and Rabbis, were infidels and murderers; that a handful of Galileans, with all the world against them, had a revelation from heaven to proclaim a new religion, and to offer it to men as the only way of eternal life. We cannot wonder that they were persecuted. Nothing but utter indifference could condone such an assumption. Gamaliel was a bold man to bid the Sanhedrim wait. Perhaps a very earnest man could not have done it. Saul of Tarsus, Gamaliel's pupil, could not. He had but two terms, truth and error; and what he counted error he must persecute to the death. We admire the earnestness; but, in theretrospect, the candid man was in the right.

When Gamaliel referred the decision to time, he gave judgment for the Gospel. It has stood the test. Everything was against it. Opinion, authority, probability, what called itself reason, what called itself religion—all denounced it. What chance was there for a faith so introduced, so supported, so circumstanced? We read Gamaliel's counsel seriously—but it might have been ironical. There is no evidence that

he himself ever accepted Christ. Liberal, cautious, candid, he was not in the highest sense earnest. He was tolerant of suspense. When he referred the matter to time, he threw off responsibility. He did not see that it was life or death to decide. He spoke as a politician, as an administrator, as a statesman; he did not speak as a man responsible for his opinion, as a sinner doomed to die, and on his way to judgment. Looking at Christianity in the abstract, looking at it as on its trial, looking at it as the rival of other systems, and with reference to its eventual defeat or victory, he proposed a criterion which was reasonable and sensible, a criterion which the Gospel accepts, and by which, eighteen centuries later, it bids us all to decide.

Christianity has stood Gamaliel's test. *Let alone*, it has not *come to nought*: its enemies have not *overthrown* it: it has lived, it has grown, it has wrought, it has influenced: in its train have come everywhere liberty and civilization, humanity and charity, rest of mind and peace with God: where it has not been so in fact, there its own principles have been belied

by its professors : on the whole, so marked have been its blessings, that philanthropists have sung its praise, and philosophers have at least wished it true.

Nor can it be said that accident has favoured its course, or that, where it has been accepted, it has been on trust. No religion was ever so severely handled. Its claims were exclusive, and challenged antagonism. It would not seat itself in one Pantheon with Paganism, as the best of religions, yet still one of many. It would not make friends even with Judaism, whose divine authorship it recognized. Its very charity was a self-assertion. It claimed to be love, as revealing love. Its records were sifted, were scrutinized, everywhere and in all ages, with the double microscope of love and hate. The word was *tried to the uttermost*—if anything came out of that crucible, it must have been gold. Yet never was the Bible more loved, more revered, more used, more obeyed, than now, in this untrusting, this sceptical, this incredulous age: the Bible, like the Gospel which it enshrines, has not come to nought: it too has stood the test of time—and they who

fight against its *work* or its *counsel* must take heed, Gamaliel's being the criterion, *lest haply they be found even to fight against God.*

My brethren, I have recommended the criterion for private use, and for public. I have urged you to defer your judgments, as upon kinsfolk and acquaintance, so upon suspected strangers and warring kings. I would go further. I would bid you, upon every question save one, to do likewise. Even upon some religious questions, it is better to be in suspense than to judge wrong. If men come to you, saying that this or that text ought to be differently read or differently interpreted—if men come to you, bidding you believe this marvel or that, saying that they have seen a spirit, or held converse with the dead—nay, if they tell you that such or such a person has wrought a miracle of healing, or spoken in an unknown tongue—I know not that you could do better than say with Gamaliel, Refrain from that man and let him alone; for if his idea be his own, it will come to nought—and if otherwise, let us not fight against truth.

But there is just one subject which we must

by all means except from this treatment; and that, inconsistent as it may appear, is the truth or falsehood of Christianity itself. Gamaliel, in those earliest days of the Gospel, had some excuse perhaps for postponement. It had been better, no doubt—better for his soul, better for his country—if he, too, had gone into the evidences which he thus threw wholly upon the decision of the future. But we have not even his excuse. His criterion has been applied, and we see the issue. The work of Christ, the counsel of the Crucified, has not come to nought. It would have done so by this time if it ever could. It has been tried by time, and it lives. It has been tried by persecution, tried by contempt, tried by reasoning, tried by ridicule—and still it is, and prevails. How long are we to expect? How often shall we to send to Christ, saying, *Art thou He that should come?* It is not as though we were immortal in the body. It is not as though we could hang on, unconcerned spectators, till some indefinite nameless day, when the battle shall have been fought out, and Christ or the devil remain visible victor upon the blood-stained field. We

are responsible, responsible in soul and eternal life, for settling the question for ourselves. We admire candour, but we admire not indifference. There are subjects, there is one subject, on which to be neutral is to take a side. Christ Himself says, *He that is not with me is against me.* It is idle to dream of some day of decision, when the great controversy shall have fought itself out, so that he who runs may read the issue. No man in his senses will postpone the momentous questions of this life—his profession, for instance, or his marriage—until he can foresee with absolute certainty whether the one shall be prosperous, whether the other shall be happy. So it is with the soul. What is right, and what is true—what my duty is, to-day, and to-morrow, and the day following—what my belief is, who is my God, and whether I have a Saviour; these are urgent things, which only the gambler can trifle with. With certainty or with probability, with a degree of certainty, less or greater, these matters must be settled, settled on the instant; inasmuch as, if there be a judgment, it must take account of them; and if there be a Saviour, He must demand the heart.



On these topics I view with suspicion a candour which can smile and wait. It is not necessary for us to settle which is in the right, or whether both are in the wrong, of two belligerent kings. It is not necessary for us to have an opinion as to the guilt or innocence of an accused prisoner, who has his jury to try and his judge to sentence him. It is not necessary for us to be positive as to each point of Church-government, or each theory of Inspiration or Atonement. But it is necessary that we should not stand by and look on while right and wrong, while truth and falsehood, while God and the devil, wage their mighty battle in this soul, in this life. In this war there are no neutrals: he who sides not with Christ has already enlisted himself against Him. *Who is on the Lord's side?* is the cry which rings in all ears: it is not the Gamaliels or the Gallios, it is not even the Nicodemus who comes by night, or timidly argues for a hearing—it is the Elijah girded for conflict, and asking, *How long halt ye between two opinions?* it is the Paul, convinced and converted, counting all things loss for the excellency of Christ, and dying daily if he may but win Him

—it is these who are the men, not more of faith than of reason; these who run the race, and these who win the crown. The mischief is infinite of the mere *refrainers* and *letters alone*, when the subject is the Bible, the Gospel, the Saviour. Open hostility is better—may be truer, nobler, safer—than this, not armed, perhaps, but *secure neutrality*. These men are not fighting; they are pausing. They are intelligent men, tolerant men, candid men—open to conviction, open and waiting for it. Oh! we know the sound so well in these days. These men have a uniform. They have their own badge, and signal, and watchword. They dishearten the true soldier more than any foe. They make him feel himself irrational, unreasoning, credulous. They leave upon his mind, struggle against it as he may, an impression that his defences may be unsound, that his ground may be untenable. Let me see my foe, meet him face to face—and I shall not flinch or quail. But this weapon from a mile off, out of sight, aimed by a secret engine, by a skulking foe—how can I deal with it? Be men! Choose your side deliberately, gravely, anxiously;

but in this greatest of all battles, when it is chosen, fight for it to the death ! Gamaliel's test has been applied, and Christ and Christ's Gospel has stood it. There remains now but Gamaliel's caution—*Lest haply ye be found even to fight against God !*

My brethren, you have heard the announcement which warns us that this is a farewell service. The custom of this Church is so. There is a reason for it in the circumstances of the Congregation ; a reason sufficient if not conclusive. Let us see whether we can at all profit by it.

*Come ye ourselves apart*, said Christ once to the disciples, *and rest awhile. There had been many*, the Evangelist adds, *coming and going ; and they had had no leisure so much as to eat.* There were other causes too. Change, as well as rest, is a necessity of this being. Change is rest. Change is profit too. The Psalmist says, *Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God.* Life is apt to settle upon its lees. Bad habits—and there are habits of mind as well as of conduct—result oftentimes from

want of change. When we go apart from every-day duties, then—at least, if we will take Christ with us—we see many things differently ; bring sins and neglects to remembrance, and prepare ourselves by reflection and humiliation for a better, a safer, a more Christian return.

So may it be with us. Some are ending to-day a life of preparation—entering upon a responsible future, in which God be with them ! Some have been severely visited in the months past, and have need to lay well to heart in retirement the purposes of God's dealing. All have need to enter into judgment with themselves.

In silence, ere that storm begin,  
Count o'er His mercies, and thy sin.

We separate, with a black cloud hanging over the horizon, not knowing where or when it may break in disastrous storm. This very day—this calm blessed Sunday, soft with drops of beneficent rain, as it looks in England—God looks—we have reason to believe—upon the relics of a terrible battle, followed by a slow night of agony and a long long morrow of wailing. Let us

humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God. Our nation watches for tidings : may it be not in curiosity, not in speculation—still less in heartless eagerness for intelligence which must be the death-knell of thousands—an eagerness indifferent who suffers may but our breakfast-table not lack its news ! Let a deep seriousness pervade our tranquillity, our enjoyment, our relaxation—and may the words be verified in our experience, *When Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.*

Our year began, on the 7th of November—let it end, on the 7th of August—at the Holy Table. *Arise and eat*, the Angel said to the sleeping Prophet—let a greater than the Angel say to us—*Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for thee.* Let all those, present now in the sanctuary, who have ever taken upon themselves the vow of their Baptism, remain, I beseech them, with us, to seal that vow afresh in the Holy of Holies ! Let us take once again this day the military oath, the *sacramentum*, of Christ's loyal true-hearted soldier, and swear, God helping us, that we will be His only and to the

death! It is the best of preparations for this pause which is to be in our public worship and service—saying to each one of us, in the words of one of this day's lessons, *Let us consider one another, to provoke unto love and to good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another, and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.*

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